INTERVIEWER: My name is Gwen Fisher and I'm privileged today to be with Ms. Alberta Jones. She is one of our ***Voices of the Neuse*** that's going to talk about her life and we are so privileged to have her today. She's at 213 Jones Street, New Bern, North Carolina.

Ms. Alberta, please tell us your name, your birthplace, and all of that.

MRS. JONES: My name is Alberta E. Jones, born in New Bern North Carolina, December 8, 1920, to Rosa E. Whitfield Jones and William Jones. They were my parents.

INTERVIEWER: Ms. Alberta, would you describe yourself and your family, and how you grew up here in New Bern?

MRS. JONES: I had a very happy childhood. I had very devoted and concerned parents. My mother had gone to school in Jones County, to the third grade. And, J.T. Barber (John Thomas Barber) was her teacher. My father had a very limited education but my mother went along with us in school from the 3rd grade to the 7th grade and taught my father as she went along. We took Civics at West Street School. During the Preamble to the Constitution, I believe that you had to recite in order to be able to vote. You had to know that. When you went to vote, they would put that out for you to read. I went to what is specified now as a day care center, or a day school. I went to a day school that was operated by Mrs. Scott. There is a plaque at Ebenezer Presbyterian Church as a memorial to Rev. and Mrs. Scott. They lived over on Liberty Street which was right across the street from where we live and the school was on Roundtree Street, on the corner of Roundtree Street and _____Alley. The big Davenport house was on that corner and the school was on this corner. In the school we were taught, counting, adding, to read, and our alphabets, in the day school. I went from the day school to West Street School. At that time, we were living on Cooper Street, which is now Church Street. My mother had two children who had Spinal Meningitis and we were quarantined on Cooper Street, and could not go back to school for a whole year. So, when that year was up, instead of going back to West Street School, (before that year was up), St. Joseph's School, which was the Catholic school, took us in as students. So when I went back to West Street School, I was in the second grade and Ms. Willie Blackley Mumford was my second grade teacher and Ms. Adalaide Fisher Hooker was my sister's first grade teacher. This was at West Street School.

INTERVIEWER: What year was that? Do you remember the great fire in 1922?

MRS. JONES: No, I was only two years old.

INTERVIEWER: That's what I thought; you were born in 1920.

MRS. JONES: Yes, the fire was in 1922. All I know about the fire in 1922 is from all history what I have read, what the people had in the paper concerning the great fire.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I have one question. Do you have time to tell us about that dress you made?

MRS. JONES: Well, before I get to that, you were talking about the school business. I went from 2nd grade to the 11th grade at West Street School. There were many activities in the school, then. The school and the church were the center of the Black community. We had most of our meetings at the church. At the school, we had the same thing they have at the Bank of the Arts. They have the children's art work on display. That used to be at West Street School, grade by grade; from grade one to grade eleven. That would be a big thing. Crowds and crowds of people would come and look at the arts display. You started taking Home Economics in the 7th grade. Whatever you made (I don't care how bad it was sewn), it was on display. We learned about food, all about vitamins, in Home Economics. Home Economics was started from the 7th grade. You had to take it. After the 7th grade, you could choose whether or not to take it, but it was mandatory in the 7th grade. Ms. Carrie Fisher was the teacher for Home Economics. Now you want to get back to the dresses. Go right out there in the hall and look at that picture. Do you see a lady bent over with a real long dress on?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, ma'am.

MRS. JONES: Do you see another lady with a long dress on?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, ma'am.

MRS. JONES: Those people were dressed for what you call the field. As I told you over there, my mother was born March 17, 1888, before they had birth certificates. I had a brother that was born in 1910. This was before they had birth certificates. This school up here, A.H. Bangert School, my mother worked for A.H. Bangert. At one time, he was the Mayor of New Bern. He had a farm in Jones County and when he found out that Jones County was my mother's ancestral home and she had no birth certificate, every week he would take her in Jones County until he found Ms. Annie Erving who told my mother (of course my mother

already knew who her mother and father was) that if they would do whatever she could get a record (not a birth certificate) of her birth. He was successful in getting a record of my mother's birth. Listen to me good; I'm not saying birth certificate. She was born March 17th in Jones County, 1888. She also told him her second child was born in 1910 and I know birth certificates still were not being issued to black people. You got that? Mr. Bangert told her that through this place out in Utah that keeps a record of everything, that she would be able to find out when, get a birth certificate for her son. They sent a paper back saying he was born (just like my mother knew) December 10, 1910. Now you listen to this good; still no birth certificate. When he went into the Merchant Marines, the military got him a birth certificate saying that he was born December 10, 1910. He was a man over 25 years of age who had been struggling over these years trying to get a birth certificate.

Now you want to get to the dresses, right? My mother told me that the means of transportation for coming to New Bern was on the Steamer Neuse which was a boat, or by a horse and cart, or by carriage. There was chaos in Jones County. People were being driven off their land, stating that "this doesn't belong to you; you were just a sharecropper." My great-great grandfather was a Baptist preacher up there. Where Morris Chapel church is now they had a little tent church. My mother's people were being displaced because they said they did not actually own the land. But they had been there for years and years and years, tending and whatever. So they packed up and got on the Steamer Neuse and they came to the area of Wachovia Bank; that's where the boat docked. My mother remembers the date that they docked there. It coincided with when the cornerstone was laid at Guilfield Church. My mother said that people were just milling all over everywhere. No one knew where they were going or what they were going to do. But there is some faint history; they put up a tent house over in James City. My mother said there were many children who had become separated from their parents. She also said there were people over there (mainly men – I know they had to be white men) who were looking for the strays to haul them back to work the farms. She said that a lot of women had those real wide, big skirts, and they would take a child and put him up under there and just stand until they had passed by. When I went to the Historical Society, they mentioned that this had happened in Onslow County. James City became known for a place where freed slaves and indentured slaves would come. Mr. Frank Evans' great-grandfather was an indentured slave. My mother said that the ladies with those big skirts would take one child and put them up under the skirts until the people had passed to prevent them from being taken back. At one time, there was a lady that lived right across the street, that would get water from that pump and she said she did not know what

her name was; she did not know where she came from; she did not know any of her people. If you asked her what was her name, she would say "My name is Big Nigger" because wherever she ended up, people would call her "Big Nigger". She lived right across the street.

Medicines and whatever were carried in the pockets of those skirts. They would have different kinds of herbs for whatever sickness you had. Some were Camphor, Jerusalem Root, and Sassafras (tea was made from this). They had something else that they made tea out of for a cold. They also had Tanzent for medical cramps, and pain from giving birth.

INTERVIEWER: What are some of the African Americans who owned businesses?

MRS. JONES: What I remember growing up was how happy everybody was; all the social activities. You have the different recreation centers now. There was a Grand Army Hall that was over on Carroll Street. That was the social gathering place. Churches had bazaars there. They had parties there. They had dances there. For the military, the 30th of May, everybody lined up there and walked from there, down Broad Street to George Street, up to the National Cemetery. I marched so many times. Children would have ribbons that represented many states: New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts. They would say their little speech and they would get their cookies and lemonade afterwards. In the month of October, that was a big, big thing. People put on their masks. It was almost like a Mardi Gras. They came straight from the Grand Army Hall, right on through Five Points. When you came through Five Points, you had Mr. Watson's ice cream place. That was a business in Five Points. You had Mr. Elliott Gibbs' restaurant; Mr. George Downing's restaurant; Mr. Walter Godette's Beer Garden, those were the businesses. On the other corner, Mr. Carlton Saunders had a pool room. That was in the later years. The next business was a home _____ store. That was not a black-owned business. Across the street, you had Keskey's Meat Market. That was not a black-owned business. Still on this side of the street, you had Mr. John Alfred Boone who had a meat market; you had Mr. Steve Roberts that had a fruit and produce stand. You had Mr. Walston who had a seafood place. Someone else had a Boston bean shop where you could get bread and baked beans and whatever. Then you would be on the corner. There was a Serian man that had a hamburger place. Over on the right hand side of Broad Street, you had Mr. Bo Mattocks that sold hot dogs and hamburgers. That was next door to Ms. Sarah Murphy's café. It was a very thriving place out there for business. Then you had Bell's Barbershop

on this shop. Over where the super 10 is now, where the drive in is now where you go to the Days Inn, was what they call the [Hu] house. Why it was called the [Hu] House, I don't know. Ms. Viola Jones had a beauty parlor there downstairs. Rev. Moore, who used to be the pastor of St. John, his grandfather's wife had a boarding house there. A little on the other side of that, Mr. Banks had a barbershop. Right across from Carolina Cleaners was a drug store, Kennedy's Drug Store. On the other side of Mr. Steve Roberts was Dr. Hill's drug store. We had two drug stores.
Down on Broad Street, you had Dr. Mann, Dr. William Martin, and Dr. Mumford, three Black doctors who had their offices there. I don't know how far Five Points extends now. But Five Points used to extend from Barber Row up to where I just told you and Barber Row was where Armstrong Grocery is. That was all black community back there. Do you remember Barber Row?

INTERVIEWER: No.

MRS. JONES: You don't? Okay. There were several families that lived back there in Barber Row. And they were not skid row people. They worked every day and reared their children, sent them to school and church. All of a sudden, they tore down all of the houses. They were "shotgun" houses, like this house is. Then you were up to Sutton's Alley. You had a black mortician that lived in Sutton's Alley; Mr. Haywood Sutton. This was when the hearse was horse-driven then. His mother was a midwife. That was in Sutton's Alley nd over in Farce Alley, you had Mr. Starkey, and the Simmons'. You had Mr. Ronald Berry's wife's great-grandparents; you had the Moores and the Scotts in Farce Alley. Those places never looked like they do now. They were nice residential houses. They were property owners in those two areas. People kept their property up. They had large families, 8, 10, 12 children. From the way their children participated in whatever was going on, you would never say "he must be from the alley", like people say today "he must be from Trent Court", or "he must be from Craven Terrace". It warms my heart how children are stigmatized about where they live and they get a free lunch. Read the paper. It says 2/3 of our children are eligible for free lunches. I want to jump up and scream.

INTERVIEWER: That's what we have to tell them when they asked about Jesus and they said "He came from Nazareth? Did anything good come from Nazareth?" Some good things can come from the Alley.

MRS. JONES: They hauled the children from wherever you want to call this, to A.H. Bangert School, took them miles and miles out of their neighborhood, although they are doing that all over the United States of America. It's not only done here in New Bern. I've got sense enough to know that. But, when they get on that bus and it bumps on up there, every teacher that's up there says "All these children that's coming here, they're coming from Trent Court and they're coming from Craven Terrace." They get their mindset that this child comes in here, he gets hungry, he comes from a single family home, he doesn't have any manners, and he's exposed to drugs, drugs, drugs. This is the mindset that the teachers have when they go to get those little papers that tells them how many children are going to be in their room and where they live. That decision is already made up in their brain before they even get there. So, when they get there, they start teaching them down instead of teaching them up. It ruins the child. The child has no self-esteem.

INTERVIEWER: That's why so much work has to be done in the church.

MRS. JONES: There's a conspiracy in the way they are taught to lower their self-worth. If you come from Craven Terrace and you come from Trent Court, and get a free lunch, "I'm going to have to tell you from the first day of school until the last day of school that 4 and 3 are 7." That's bad. When I was growing up, the average child, when he went to school, didn't have a telephone but he knew where he lived. When you went to school, did you know where you lived?

INTERVIEWER: I sure did.

MRS. JONES: Every single one of mine knew that they lived at 222 Jones St., New Bern, North Carolina and that their mother was named Alberta Jones.

INTERVIEWER: My son used to say, "A teacher asked me your name mama, and I told her it was Gwendolyn Fisher". I said "My name isn't Gwendolyn. We've got to get them straight; let them know. In school, who was your first teacher?

MRS. JONES: There were always some folks I liked among black people in New Bern. You had the Realistic Club, the Climbers Club, the Jolly Makers Club, the Just Us Club, and that included everybody. When I say everybody, (listen to me good), there were a lot of people in the Climbers Club that didn't have a college degree. The working class of people and the people who had degrees were all chummy together. In this neighborhood where I was reared, if you were poor, you really didn't know that you were poor. Your parents gave you a pretty dress for Easter and you were dressed up like everybody else. You had Sunday clothes. You

had everyday clothes. If you had one pair of shoes, you shined them up real bright to get out there on Sunday. There was no way around going to church.

INTERVIEWER: What was the name of the church that you and your family went to?

MRS. JONES: My mother was Clinton Chapel and my father was St. Peter's. We were raised between the two churches.

INTERVIEWER: Are you still A.M.E. Zion?

MRS. JONES: Yes. The men in this area worked on the farm; they worked at the saw mill, they were carpenters. We had carpenters and we had master carpenters. Mr. John Richardson that lived in the third house from here went to school in Virginia, not St. Petersburg. He went to take up carpenter. His brother-in law, Mr. Charlie Harris, was a master Pasterer. This is the kind of neighborhood that we lived in. People were happy that they had a job. My mother didn't go out to work until I was 12 years of age. They stayed home. They did laundry. Ms. Emma Williams and my mother did the laundry for St. Luke's Hospital nurses. They were in training. Mrs. Carolyn Moore Bland's grandmother and my mother did tablecloths and napkins for the _____ Hotel. Ms. Celia Simmons that lived down Church Street practically ran a laundry down there. Ms. Rachel Bryant was a laundress. The only school teachers that were in this vicinity were Ms. Eleanor Willis that lived in this house right over here taught at West Street School and Mrs. O'Hara (her husband was a lawyer). Her house is down there near the waterfront. Mrs. O'Hara taught at West Street School. Fern Cotton and her family stayed near there when they first came here. Judge Stanley had an office on the corner where the beauty shop is now. Carolyn Moore Bland's father had a grocery store. Mr. George Green had a grocery store on the corner where the Habitat is located.

INTERVIEWER: Did Miss Carter stay up here too?

MRS. JONES: Ms. Dorothy Carter? Yes, she stayed here in the latter years. Ms. Rachel Bryant was her aunt. She had a sister named Rozetta that lived in the house that Dorothy and her family moved to. They had two boys, Christopher and George. We went to school together. They were her Aunt Rozetta's sons.

INTERVIEWER: I met one of them. He's an electrician.

MRS. JONES: How long ago was that?

INTERVIEWER: I met him when they came over to Bakers' house. They kept in contact.

MRS. JONES: What else do you want to know?

INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little about your church. Do you still participate in things?

MRS. JONES: Wholeheartedly. I went to church, went to Sunday School, BYTU to St. John's. I went to Sunday School at Pilgrim Chapel, BYTU at Mt. Calvary.

INTERVIEWER: So, church was a "Must".

MRS. JONES: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Could you tell us anything about the Civil Rights movement in the 1930's and 1940's?

MRS. JONES: I have a nephew that participated in Civil Rights: sit-ins. But I was very aware of the Civil Rights movement, I kept up with what was happening and supported any venture (mainly the NAACP). I did not participate in any of the marches and the sit-ins. I was working downtown at the Governor Tryon Hotel which was on South Front Street at that time. When I would leave my work coming home days, we would come through different streets. The marchers would be where Kress used to be down to the corner where Gaskins soda shop was. A lot of people would cross the street; I walked on the same side.

INTERVIEWER: Could you tell us a little about the segregated facilities? Do you know something about that? How do you fee about that?

MRS. JONES: Well, once you got out of your neighborhood, you were segregated. Growing up I'm sure most parents did the same thing. Whenever they were going downtown, even the post office, this was my first experience. I wasn't told "you're not next". The man looked over my shoulder and said "Next". That made me look back and there was a white man standing there. That was my first confrontation with direct segregation. Most parents, when they took their children downtown, if they had to go to the bathroom, or get a drink of water, those needs were met. When you get downtown, you cannot drink the water and you cannot go to the bathroom. My mother would go even further than that. Inside the store, like Kress's, they sold hot dogs and ice cream cones. My mother would not buy one. Sometimes we would have our little money, but my mother said "if you buy one,

I'm going to choke it out of you." When you went in the shoe store, close to the back, they had seats. If those seats were full, you had to stand up. Nobody got up to let you sit down. That was to buy shoes. The store next to that was called _____. I'd say they sold upscale clothes. I don't remember my mother ever going in there. Charles Store was a department store that had clothes, etc. What I do remember is that you could not try on hats, not that we ever bought any hats. The lady in the millinery department would say, do you know what hat size you take? She could pick out your size, but trying on several hats to decide which one you wanted, did not happen. You had separate dressing rooms for that. When I went in to try on clothes, I had to leave my purse outside of the dressing room. Belks store was on one corner. We did not visit J.C. Penney. There was Montgomery Wards, Krogers, Askews. Askews was a place you could buy clothes and pay for them so much a week, month, etc. There was a men's shop called "Hills". Further down the street was Suskinds. They were Jews. I went there in later years to clothes for my nephew (tall with big feet). They would just bring out the clothes and leave them for you to try on. Littman's department store is where my mother bought yard goods. They were very hospitable. There was a reason. They supplied products that they knew people needed. Black people could not buy furniture at Turner-Tolson. They couldn't afford it. Jones Furniture: if you were a school teacher or a doctor or a lawyer, you could get something there. Across the street was Joe Litman's Furniture; you could go there and pay $25 or whatever you had per week; so most of the Blacks had furniture from there. He sold all furniture, stoves, refrigerators, etc. Later years, when the owner and his wife died and left a son in there, he treated us differently. His parents knew that we could not afford much. We were independent people; we didn't have social services.

INTERVIEWER: How did the Depression affect your family?

MRS. JONES: My father was a carpenter. Two years before the Depression (1927 and 1928), my mother had a nervous breakdown and her sister came here and took us to Hempstead and we stayed there about two years and we came back. Right after we came back here, people would go down the street and say "the banks are gone broke". I don't think my parents had a million dollars in the back. My mother went to work for A.H. Bangert in 1930. He was a big stockholder in First Citizens. My mother was always a good listener. He would talk to my mother. I don't know how the people lived. We had something to eat every single day. The only thing that I can think of that we were being stressed for is paying insurance. At that time, black people could not take out a $1000 insurance policy. They could take out only $250. My parents. My parents would have two $250 policies which would make $500. I think that was a struggle for them, to get the insurance money

together. But we didn't know then. We ate every day. We didn't eat molasses and bread or peas or beans. We ate a lot of fish, potatoes, collards, string beans and corn, because everybody had a garden. When your row was out, you were always welcome to go over. My people used to pick a big thing of string beans and set them out. Anybody who would come buy, they didn't have to buy them for $.10 or $.05, they could just get some of them. The men that fished (my grandfather was a fisherman) would come in from fishing and push carts up and down the streets and sell them for a penny. They would say "penny fish coming". Eggs weren't but $.12 a dozen and just about everybody had some chickens. But if you didn't have any eggs, you could always go out to Mr. Joe Israel's, a black merchant, and get 12 eggs. The only thing that we realized during the depression was school supplies. You had to buy your own books. I remember that my father would get a pencil and cut it in half and give one part to me and one part to my sister. One would have the part with the eraser and the other one would have the other part. He would tell us not to sharpen them up too quick. I think they were only $.01 each. Downtown on the corner of Middle Street_____ where this upscale fish market was, was Duffy's Drug store. This is where you bought your books. That was a problem because once you got past the first grade, you had more than one book. And it was very seldom would you, your brother and your sister would be in the same class. But even with it being that stringent, if a child did not have his book, and he lived in your neighborhood, or knew you, he was welcome to come in your house and do his homework. My mother made our dresses, our skirts, our underclothes, everything, on the sewing machine. Mr. Abraham Bryant had a shoe repair place in Five Points. On the corner of New and George Street, Mr. John T. Hatems had a shoe repair shop. You could get your shoes half-soled for $.25. But my father had his own _____ and he would half-sole our shoes. Of course, all of the tacks wouldn't be where they supposed to be.

INTERVIEWER: We would like to thank you. Is there anything that you would like to tell us that we did not mention? Or, would you give us some words of wisdom?

MRS. JONES: I don't have any wisdom. All of my wisdom is gone. I've raised four daughters, six sons, so you know my wisdom is gone.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you so much for this interview.