

## Joseph George

Interviewer: My name is Donna Rhein. I'm here with Bernard George's brother Joseph George and we are at the Housing Authority, which is where his office is. Mr. George will you tell us something about your background, where you were born and your family?

Mr. George: I was born in New Bern North Carolina. I'm the oldest of 11 children born to the late Joseph Grayson George and Clementine C. George. My daddy was a brick mason. He passed about a year a month ago and his daddy was a carpenter. I was brought up with strong male influences. Family life was a priority. My father by the way, his name is on the plaque at First Citizen Bank on Broad Street. He is listed as the master brick mason, which is a real rarity. He is listed with the contractors along with the Board of Directors of First Citizen Bank. I am very proud of the contribution that my father made. I'm proud of the legacy that I have inherited from them. You don't have to be famous to have a history but I come from a rich history.

With that said, I was brought up in the church. My home church is Clinton Chapel AME Zion Church although I'm now pastor of St. Peter's AME Zion Church on Queen Street which by the way, is the mother church of Zion [] in the south which means that is the oldest AME Zion Church in the south. I came to that church as pastor because as a youth growing up, that church had the only black Boy Scout Troop in town. It was Boy Scout Troop 121. I think that Boy Scout Troop had a lot to do with forming and helping to develop whatever leadership skills I have acquired. I think it was very, very instrumental. It provided a foundation and so after I became a pastor, the church was in very poor condition. I asked the Bishop to send me here to St. Peter's so that I could try to improve and restore that church.

Interviewer: Where did you go to educate for that?

Mr. George: I have a Masters of Divinity degree from Shaw Divinity School. A Master Divinity degree requires 84 semester hours. Not only do I have a Master Divinity degree, I have a BS degree from A&T University in Greensboro and I have a Masters in Education Administration from Cornell University in Ithaca. I have an EDS which is an Education Specialist from ECU which certifies me as superintendent. So I've been in school a little while. I am proud to say that I was the first black selected as Executive Assistant for the North Carolina Leadership Institute for Principals. That

program selects one high school principal, one Jr. high principal and one elementary principal from throughout the state and you're suppose to be good. You go there and you are on loan from your school system from the state department. You go around the schools helping principals to become proficient and you get a chance to horn your skills by going out of state and by being in the presencet of the [       ]

Interviewer: Were you in the educational side before being in the pastoral side?

Mr. George: I was in education. I'm an educator.

Interviewer: Is that what you started doing as an adult?

Mr. George: I was an educator. When I came out of school after I graduated from A&T. I went to Jones County as a teacher, coach and Assistant Principal. I was a teacher there for three years and then I got a Fellowship to Cornell University, got my masters, came back and was the principal for 10 or 12 years. I went to the Principal Institute in Raleigh for a year then I went to Goldsboro City School as Assistant Superintendent before coming here in May 1984. I've held this position for 24 years. The Executive Director of the City of New Bern Housing Authority.

Interviewer: When did you come to St. Peter's?

Mr. George: I came to St. Peter's about eight years ago. I had my first church, full Sunday church was in Beaufort, NC about 40 miles from here. The church was in very bad condition. The Lord allowed me to lead that congregation into a wonderful restoration project. Then I was assigned to York Memorial in Greenville, after being there I had done such a wonderful job. I was lead by the sprit to ask the Bishop to send me here and he ready agreed, reminded me that he asked me to come before and my words were, why he want me to go, why you trying to punish me I haven't done anything.

Interviewer: Was it a bad situation?

Mr. George: It was a bad situation, the church was leaking, it was in deplorable condition. Now it is a work of art. It has been restored magnificently and I've just completed my 8<sup>th</sup> year in November.



Interviewer: What's the congregation like there?

Mr. George: We got a small congregation but a very dedicated congregation. We have about a 100 or 110 members. We're a small congregation with a very big church but we have a very lively worship service and we're a bible teaching, bible believing bible preaching church.

Interviewer: Sounds like an exciting place.

Mr. George: It's an exciting place to be. Particularly on Sunday mornings for worship and Wednesday night for bible study. We are very involved in the community at St. Peter's. It has a history of being involved. It was the place that held the meetings and luncheons pads for the Civil Rights demonstrations that I was not here during the 60's I was at A&T but that was the place where they met, they left St. Peter's AME Zion Church often the times before they went down to demonstrate. It is still very active and its people are very active. For example, Lee Morgan, was the first and only black mayor, he was a trustee in that church. I was the original president of the Craven County Voters League that takes the responsibility for getting blacks elected. Lee Morgan had run twice and he lost. When I organized the Craven County Voters League I thought that I owed the community something, I was back from Cornell and once we organized, things began to happen.

Interviewer: What year was that you think?

Mr. George: I got back from Cornell about 72 maybe around 74, I'm not quite sure but I know we got Lee Morgan elected, he won by about 97 votes and from there things began to happen. We got black county commissioners we got other black elected and St. Peter's was very active. For example when Lee Morgan was elected the City Council in New Bern is comprised of the mayor and 4 or 5 city councilmen, I do know for a fact that Lee Morgan was out of St. Peter's he was the mayor, Barbara Lee, the alderman, was out of St. Peter's, Julius Parham at that time was out of St. Peter's he is no longer a member and Robert Raynor is a Catholic. You got to consider 3 of the 4 blacks were out of St. Peter's.

Interviewer: Why do you think that give birth to so many active people?

Mr. George: St. Peter's has always been active in the community, it has always taken pride in the legacy.

Interviewer: So then the ministers.

Mr. George: I think it's the church.

Interviewer: You mean the whole congregation?

Mr. George: The whole congregation. St Peter's has had as many ministers as carter had liver pills. So they have been through and they have been out. We have a since of responsibility at St. Peter's, as to if god has blessed us, we're a bless congregation there and we really feel that if god has blessed us then we should be a blessing to others. For example when they were trying to find a place for Obama, when his campaign was organized it was organized at ST. Peter's. I was the pastor there and we simply did what we had to do and we have taken this stand.

Interviewer: What did you do to help Obama?

Mr. George: His organization meeting was at St. Peter's.

Interviewer: They came in and said we need to meet some place where can we go?

Mr. George: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you stand up and do that?

Mr. George: Sure! Subsequence meetings were held there. Now if you're going to be what the Lord would want you to be you should be able to make a different when that time come. Because the majority is not always right. We need to take a stand. We were right we got the word out

Interviewer: For Mr. Obama's campaign?

Mr. George: Oh yes! Not only that, when you look at the folks that were part of the legacy here at St. Peter's, Grover C. Fields, the school was named after him. Mr. Fields was my Biology teacher and later he was my principal. He was a member and trustee of St. Peter's.

Interviewer: What school was he at?



Mr. George: JT Barber. He was an excellent principal. Now he told me out of his own mouth "the way he got to be the principal of New Bern High School when they integrated, it was a tradition for black high school principals to become assistant principals to white high schools principals. They came at Mr. Fields to become assistant principal to Mr. Honeycutt. I am almost positive that's his name. Mr. Fields said he said, "assistant to whom. Who do you have in the system any better than I am?" So with that stand they left him at J.T. Barber. Mr. Honeycutt, the white principal could not handle that school. They were rioting, he couldn't keep control, no learning was going on and so they got rid of him, sent Mr. Fields over and he got the school in order.

Interviewer: Is this the board of education that did that?

Mr. George: Yes, the Board of Education is the one who through the superintendent, the superintendent assign and they have to approve. So if he had gone over as the Assistant Principal, the white principal, Mr. Honeycutt would have still been there.

Later on when Mr. Fields retired, I wanted his job. I was principal of Jones Jr. High School. Mr. Fields did not support me. My high school history teacher, Mr. Lathus Attmore did not support me. They told me to my face "you do not want this job it's a man killer." I was young, I wanted the job, the lord knows that I didn't need that job. I interviewed and came in number 2. They offered the job to a young white guy who had been out of the business. He was a photogopher. He turned the job down. I was suppose to be number 2. They didn't offer the job to me. They gave it to Mr. Tommy Phelps. I have no problem because the lord works in mysterious ways. That very next year before the year was out I selected to go the NC Leadership Institute for Principals and my career just have been pleasantly productive from that point on. If I had been the principal at New Bern High School I would have been stroked out on disability or dead because of my A type personality. Mr. Fields, my principal and Mr. Attmore my World History teacher who by the way I did my student teaching under didn't support me they told me I didn't need the job. They were right. That was what I was suppose to be doing according to my boss man up there.

Interviewer: That's when you were teaching around?

Mr. George: Oh no! I wasn't teaching I was the principal.

Interviewer: But in Jones County and around you hadn't moved back to New Bern yet.

Mr. George: I never left New Bern. When I went to Goldsboro, you see Jones County is only 20 miles from here. So I could live in New Bern, be the principal and teach. When I went to Goldsboro I had a sister who still live there, so I lived with her and came home once or twice a week and every weekend.

Interviewer: So you never lost your ties all this time?

Mr. George: Never! I have never missed a Christmas from being home in New Bern. I was in the Navy 4 year. So my ties in New Bern, knowing some of the history in New Bern its just a natural for me.

Interviewer: How did you get into the Housing Authority? Were you ever an elected Official?

Mr. George: Good question, I was always very interested in what took place in New Bern; I was down town when the police department resigned.

Interviewer: What was that all about?

Mr. George: They had some dispute, there was a City Manager here name Outlaw I loved him. His son is Dana Outlaw who is now on the City Council, he just did an appraisal for my daddy's house who passed about a year and a month ago, but there was some dispute about a Chief Worsham. Chief Worsham was a retired FBI agent who was the police chief at that time. The powers to be didn't like him. They wanted him out. Most of the police force, I was down there that night, when most of the police force walked down, when they didn't rehire him at that particular meeting, they ended up rehiring him, they put their badges and pistols on the table down at City Hall and walked out. So I watched this.

Interviewer: When was that?

Mr. George: Oh it's been years ago.

Interviewer: Was it the 70's or 80s?



Mr. George: I think it was the 70's cause I was not here then. I came here in 84 at this job.

Interviewer: You just happen to be down town when that happened?

Mr. George: No, I was always interested, I lived behind a guy name Willie Bell who was the President of the NAACP. He used to tell me so many stories about injustices and that kind of thing that he just captivated my mind and I used to follow him. That's how I formed the Voters League because the NAACP could not be partisan in politics but the Voters League could.

Interviewer: Could actually stand up and support a candidate.

Mr. George: Yes.

Interviewer: So you have always been interested in the political solutions to the community's problem.

Mr. George: Always. I understand very well. A lot of people can't even define politics. Politics is a redistribution of the wealth, resources and the power. That's why every time there is an election, things change. You elect republican things change you elect democrat things change. There is a redistribution of the power the influence and the wealth.

Interviewer: You consider yourself sort of a watchdog for the way that's distributed through the community?

Mr. George: Oh yes, I like to watch things and I like to predict before things happen.

Interviewer: That's why you were down at the Police Station because you thought something was going to happen.

Mr. George: Oh, I knew it was because we had got the word. One of the things we did, they had a grant here for building the Recreation Center. The powers to be wanted one big recreation center. We said no way, we had to sign off on this thing. You see, Craven County used to be one of the counties that were under the Civil Rights that were under the Justice Department. The Justice Department had to approve things.

Interviewer: To make sure that you were complying with the law.

Mr. George: That's right because we were one of the counties because we had a history or whatever.

Interviewer: You said we had to approve.

Mr. George: I'm sorry; the Justice Department had to approve certain things if we brought it to their attention.

Interviewer: Who would be we to bring it to their attention?

Mr. George: The black folks.

Interviewer: You mean like the black community would say we don't want the recreation cent to be one.

Mr. George: If we didn't agree the money would go back. We didn't want one recreation center. They were talking about how good one would be they could put everything in it. We knew it would be difficult for the black kids to get from where we live over there where they got that white recreation center. We said before we do that we'll send the money back, it won't be any recreation center.

Interviewer: Wouldn't that been kind of difficult with the idea of integration.

Mr. George: No, this country has not integrated. We have desegregated. We have not integrated.

Interviewer: I know one of the things that most black communities know is that integration helped destroy the black community so you were fighting to keep some kind of integrity.

Mr. George: Sure, integrity. The children from Duffyfield could not get out there.

Interviewer: What year was this. Was it still in the 70's?

Mr. George: 70's and early 80's because I came here in 84. Let me give you another example of what we've been through. There is on the corner of Cedar and Bern Street a place called the Omega Center. Let me tell you



how that came about. It is now called the Jasper Hayes Omega Center. Years ago when the high school basketball team played basketball, they played on the ground.

Interviewer: You're talking about blacks.

Mr. George: Yes. My fraternity brother, Jasper Hayes who taught brick mason. We launched a campaign and we brought 5 cents for stones for years. Jasper Hayes got enough money (lead by the Black Business Men Association) and he took his brick masons class and built that place. It went up, we played ball in it and finally we put a roof on it. Somehow the city took it over. Mrs. Benge, the mayor was talking, one time we were trying to get some money for something, and she said the Women's Club built that place. I said I beg the differ and I gave her the

Interviewer: She was thinking of Charlotte Rose's Place?

Mr. George: No, she knew where the gym was. She thought the white Women's Club had built it. I then gave her the history of how it got built.

Interviewer: You said your ferturnity brother. Which one was that?

Mr. George: Omega Si Fi.

Interviewer: How did that association help you as you were growing up or became an adult in this community?

Mr. George: It's a college fraternity, National Fraternity. It was only after I graduated college. I had the grades. When I went to college I had a wife and two children. I didn't have time to bother that but where I worked, the principal was a member of that fraternity and some fine black men were members of that fraternity. They were role models.

Interviewer: Were they New Bern people? So you met these guys as a young man. You found out some people from New Bern were members of that club?

Mr. George: Yes, we were all members. At that particular time it's ironic. The members consist of black men from as far west as Goldsboro and as far North as Rocky Mount.

Interviewer: That met here?

Yes, but we would go from city to city. Then we would come together as a group but as the membership increased in cities, they formed their own.

Interviewer: Are these all college educators?

Mr. George: That's the criteria for being in there. You got to have a degree.

Interviewer: Who was some of the ones that were in the one when you first joined here in New Bern, when you built you building?

Mr. George: Mr. Hayes, F.R Daniels, I would be hard press, AD Smith he was a principal.

Interviewer: Still active in it yourself?

Mr. George: Oh yes, I'm a life member. There are four at our church. Tom Harding, his wife Ester Harding, she is the Chairman of the Board of Election. Sam Combs, James Lanier he is retired and Joe George.

Interviewer: What do you all do? Is it a service organization?

Mr. George: It is a fraternity as our foundation decreed scholarship, organization.

Interviewer: So you work with young people?

Mr. George: We work with young people, provide scholarship, we mentor and do those things the black men need to be seen doing.

Interviewer: You keep your antennas open for other community needs?

Mr. George: We do. We are givers. We take underprivileged guys to football games. We try to set road models for them. You have to be careful how you do role models in the black community. There was a guy who graduated from one of our black colleges. Tried out for pro basketball he said. He was working at the recreation center. A very reputable white person said to me, I like him he is a good road model for blacks. I said he is not a good road model for blacks. . When you graduate from college and making \$12,000.00 a year that's not a good road model. A role model is



when someone say I want to look like him, I want to drive what he drive, dress like he dress, speak like he speak. Are you with me?

Interviewer: What happen to that guy?

Mr. George: I don't know. If you go to college and come out making \$12,000.00 a year, we have people selling crack making more than that.

Interviewer: Were down in the police station and that how you got here.

Mr. George: I am going to tell you how I got here. The fact of the matter is, black folks, we have something to offer. Let me tell you how this thing works. Have you read the paper today? It doesn't matter. Pamlico County just chose a white superintendent. A friend of mind is Assistant Superintendent down there. She went to East Carolina got her doctoral. She said, next time this thing open, I'm going to be ready. She was passed over twice. Her first cousin is married to my preacher Stuart. We told her husband to tell her it's not going to happen. It has nothing to do with you getting a PHD. She perhaps was devastated.

Interviewer: Why wasn't it going to happen?

Mr. George: Because she is black. It didn't have anything to do with a doctoral.

Interviewer: Pamlico County could not put a white woman in that stronger position?

She is black. The lady is black! Pamlico County had a white woman superintendent three superintendents ago. What I am saying to you, if Jesus had interviewed in her color of her skin, Jesus wouldn't have got that job. It has nothing to do with qualifications or anything else.

Interviewer: You think that's true of New Bern?

Mr. George: Sure! We don't have a black superintendent. It's the nature of the beast. Let me talk to you for a while. There is a different in racism and prejudice. Prejudice is when we have a preference that's natural. Racism is when the race that precedes to be superior put obstacle in the path of the race that it precedes to be inferior. The man in the newspaper now, I never said he had a doctoral. He might have. He has experience. The way they get us,

if you got the qualification and certification then they will beat us on experience. If you got experience then we got to get somebody that has the doctoral.

Interviewer: Do you think she need to apply elsewhere because sometimes they don't like people in [ ]?

Mr. George: There are two black female superintendents in the state of NC.

Interviewer: Do you think Mr. Obama's election will help to break down this false [ ].

Mr. George: It is going to help, the boy is brilliant. The thing that sealed his election is when the lord got in this thing and took the money out of the economy. When he took that money out of the pocket. You see we didn't have a whole lot of money. I'll never forget my granddaddy had his money berried in a liquor jar under the tree. So he had his money.

Interviewer: So you think Obama basically beat the system because he had enough money to role over. How do you think he did it?

Mr. George: No, No. Listen to me. When the Lord took the money out of this economy it sealed Obama's victory. Those folks that had money, when the money started evaporating and the stock started going down.

Interviewer: How did that affect Obama's election?

Mr. George: He was talking about changes. You don't have to be a rock scientist to know most of our money has been blown up.

Interviewer: I still don't see how that guaranteed his election.

Mr. George: People began to listen. McCain was still tied to Bush and the war. Everybody knows it takes money. Economics 101 tell you that you can't have guns and butter at the same level. You are either going to have more guns or more butter.

Interviewer: You think that by knocking out the economy it was a crutch for people that they were able to hear Obama. Forget the color hear what he is saying. You not saying that nothing can be worst, try this guy.



Mr. George: Let me tell you, I have a friend who worked the phone for Obama. She called one white man and he said I 'm not about voting for Obama if he is the last man on earth. She called another white man and he said I am not voting for him I don't care how high the gas goes. I got enough money to buy my own gas. When that economy went down and money started evaporating in those stocks, people had to say what is going on here and money just coming in his campaign from every.

Interviewer: You started out by saying he was brilliant. It may be that the economy dropped down and people could hear him. Eventually people heard what he was saying. His ideas were finally being heard.

Mr. George: He is the only guy I know that started and ended with the same campaign manager. Two years ago.

Interviewer: So you have hope for Obama in terms of the black situation.

Mr. George: I have hope for Obama and this country. Obama is surrounding himself with brilliant young people. You can't beat brilliantness! Brilliant and principle you can't beat it. The problem is that good people go up there then they turn into politicians. They go up there as statesmen.

Interviewer: Lets go back to the Housing Authority that's kind of the 3<sup>rd</sup> prong of your career.

Mr. George: I want to say this about St. Peter's. St. Peter's has had some wonderful people, Grover C Fields the school was named after, he was the trustee. FR Danyuls School was name after FR Danyuls. He was the principal of the school on West Street. We've had some marvelous people. Strong men. Lee Morgan's father-in-law Bishop Rivers, he was a mortician but he was very bright, math major. I recite his philosophy now. He asked me one time, we were discussing something, he said, "I'm your friend." I said, yes but he's my cousin. We were discussing Oscar's Mortuary, they are my family, we come from Harlowe. I said but they are my family. He said something that I use in speeches. He said, "I'm your friend. Friendship is more essential than kinship you're only kin to whom you [ ] kin by [mere] coincident. But you chose your friends." That's profound! You don't have any choice of who your mother and father were. But you have a choice of who your husband is. Your friend! They had some heavy hitters there.

Interviewer: These are terrible influential in your life, obviously?

Mr. George: Then when I came back, these guys were here. They were here to help mole me plus. I am a late mature.

Interviewer: You figure so?

Mr. George: Oh yes! God doesn't give you some things until you are ready because if he give it to you before then you simply blow it.

Interviewer: You didn't tell us how old you were. You want to tell us how old you are?

Mr. George: No, you don't need to know that. I am the oldest of eleven and Bernard is the third from the youngest.

Interviewer: These strong people gave you the courage and support to carry on things that interest you.

Mr. George: Sure! My father and his father were very strong black men. They believed that you should be able to stand up for something. They believed you should not let white or black people mess over your. I remember my daddy philosophy was I'm with you in any trouble that you get in except stealing. He was very adimate about that. We were brought up in church so we were brought up with some good principles. I've been in the Navy and had good experiences.

I was Assistant Superintendent in Goldsboro. There was a lady on this board who was the wife of Dr. F S C Barnwell. If my memory serves me correctly, he had been a member of this board too but his wife was on there then.

Interviewer: What was her name?

Mr. George: I can't think of her name and another lady name Ethel Sampson. Mary Barnwell is her name. The Doc kept asking me to come back and be Director. I said I don't want to be Director of Housing Authority. Doc asked me how much do you make as Assistant Superintendent. I told him. Now I am certified. He said I can get you that and you only have 35 people to be responsible for. I said you can do what! Then I persuade the job.



Interviewer: Now was he in the health department at that time?

Mr. George: He was in private practice. He is in the Health Department now. Doc left here went to Nashville Tenn. taught at Meharry and then he ran the Veteran Administration Hospital and got one of the top 4 awards for that in the country.

Interviewer: So not only is he his own person but his credentials were impeccable?

Mr. George: He is an impeccable man. So I put in my application. They had 25 applications. I was interviewed at that table. The deal had been cut for the Assistant Executive Director, the Director was retiring. The Assistant Executive Director, the Director who since passed and two members of that board were all members of a very prominent church here.

Interviewer: Are they black people or white people?

Mr. George: They are white.

Interviewer: Because Dr. Barnwell and Mary is black

Mr. George: They dismissed me after the interview. I get home, the telephone rings. Mrs. Barnwell calls and says to me Dr. ( ) want to come by your house. I can't remember his name. He lived in Bridgeton and lighting struck his house not long ago, republican. He came to my house and asked me was my wife home. I said yes. He said, Mr. George I want to let you know that we selected you for the Housing Authority. Now let me say to you my wife asked me how did I do in the interview. I said I didn't get the job but they know that they have talked to one sharp man. They asked me, how can you run a Housing Authority when you have been in the school business. My answer was that good principals of management and leadership are good regardless of what you're running. Charlie Ashford. He said you have been elected. He said, what they were doing was racist and I couldn't be a part of that. He said Mary Barnwell and Ethel Sampson were fighting for you. I don't know whether he told me or Mrs. Barnwell said, we were raising sand for you. Finally Dr. Ashford said if you just be quiet I am voting with Mary and Ethel Sampson because what we are doing here, Mr. George is the best candidate for the job. Another gentlemen said New Bern

is not ready for a black director. This is my last meeting, I'm voting so that it will be unanimous. Look at the minutes, I was elected unanimously.

Interviewer: You don't want to tell us who that guy was?

Mr. George: No. I am sorry I called Charlie's name cause Charlie has to live here. This is what he told me. The vote had already been taken. He said, "I remember you daddy. Your daddy used to work for me. He was the finest brick mason and the finest gentlemen I have ever met." He said, "I always wondered how he could educate all those children." My daddy died a year and a month ago, November 2008 and if my memory serves me correct, Charlie Ashford was at his daddy's funeral. I always wanted to carry myself so that my name would mean something for my children. My daddy gave me a good name and I want that name untarnished.

Interviewer: Is your name the same as your dad?

Mr. George: We have different middle names. He is Joseph Grayson and I am Joseph Clinton.

Interviewer: So this was about 24 years ago?

Mr. George: 24 years ago, May 1984.

Interviewer: Tell us a little bit of how the Housing Authority works? It's black and white.

Mr. George: When I hire administrative staff, I tell them or whenever I am telling somebody about the Housing Authority, it is the only organization that I know in the U.S that operates on a common philosophy. Frederick Ingram said from each according to his ability to each according to his need is part of the common manifest, written in 1854, Fredrick Ingram and Karl Marx. That means from each according to his ability to each according to his needs if you came in here today and your income was such that you got a 3 bed room apartment but when we calculated your income you only paid \$200.00 a month that's what you pay, according to your ability. You needed two bedrooms. If somebody came for the same bedrooms and their income was such that it would be \$400.00 they got the same two bedrooms but it cost them \$400.00, is that not.



Interviewer: According to their need.

Mr. George: And I listen to them folks talking about Obama. This stuff is already here. It is already in place. Jesus first sermon was I've been anointed to preach the good news to the captives to set at liberty those that are free, the good news to the poorly and that's what Obama talked about. That's what we do at the Housing Authority.

Interviewer: When was the Housing Authority established here in New Bern?

Mr. George: This is the fifth oldest Housing Authority in the state and it came on line somewhere in 1939.

Interviewer: 1939. It's a part of the new deal.

Mr. George: Part of the new deal. The folks are looking here, developers are looking, they are going to shut you down. This place here was a slum.

Interviewer: I've heard people say they are sorry that they built these houses on the water.

Mr. George: This was a part of the new deal it was a redevelopment. Craven Terrace was a redevelopment. It didn't look like this! I'm so sorry; I don't know what I did with them pictures. It looked like something in the Jet, in the Delta or Mississippi.

Interviewer: All those old derelict doctors stuff was down there.

Mr. George: The water has become so bad and everybody looking.

Interviewer: What do you do here over these 24 years? You came in and what's happen since you've been here?

Mr. George: I can't take credit for a lot of things that has happen. We are able to set an environment that if you don't obey the rules and regulations you will be out of here. We do not tolerate any drug use.

Interviewer: I read that poster out there.

Mr. George: The easiest way to get out of here is to be caught doing some drugs. We have the mentorship and all kind of programs to encourage people to become homeowners.

Interviewer: Continuing Education.

Mr. George: Yes. We have all that kind of stuff.

Interviewer: Is it run by volunteers mainly?

Mr. George: We have staff but we do have volunteers too.

Interviewer: You said something about 35 staff members. What do they do?

Mr. George: We have administration and you have to maintain this stuff. That's why these buildings are going to be here. These buildings are just as sound as a rock. I would like to say sound as a dollar but they are sounder than a dollar. So they are going to be here. We pay the City of New Bern and Craven County Taxes. It is called payment in lieu of taxes. We have a big problem every year. So as long as these building are maintained, there is no need for them thinking that HUD is going to come in here and tear them down. They are structurally sound and we want them that way.

Interviewer: I was talking to a lady out there and there are 200 plus units.

Mr. George: I don't know. There are less over here but there are a total of 579 units.

Interviewer: Counting the ones in Duffyfield?

Mr. George: Over in Craven Terrace and 108 of Senior Citizen High Rise.

Interviewer: So those are the three.

Mr. George: Properties that we manage.

Interviewer: What happen to the people that can't get in here?

Mr. George: Oh, I don't know.



Interviewer: What are some of the challenges of the situation past, present and future?

Mr. George: The challenges are the human element, for example: Here is a mother with a son, she is struggling, he gets involved in drugs, they got to go. There are so many things that you don't feel good about. There are gray areas in life. Everything is not just black and white. Joseph Fletcher, Arthur Fletcher the father, puts it this way. Everything is not black and white he gives this illustration. During the height of the war, Germany was booming England almost into submission. Churchill got a spy in the Germany hide out. The spy got news back to Churchill. That Germany was going to boom one of its most popular cities. Churchill had a decision to make. Shall I evacuate the city and when the Germans boom it we won't lose many lives cause the city will be evacuated or do I not evacuate the city, let my spy live because when they do an assessment if the city has been evacuated they know I got a spy. Do I let they spy live and the city go up in smoke or do I let the spy die because wars are won on information. He decided to let it go up in smoke. The spy was able to keep filtering information that eventually led to victory.

Interviewer: You have to make decisions like that all the time?

Mr. George: Not that great, but for example, we do credit reports, landlord reports and it follows my line. People will go through things and somebody will come in here and say the reason I have bad credit, couldn't pay, my husband left me with three children, I didn't have a job and I couldn't pay. That is why I have to spare []. I also have to try to be consistent because if you come in here and tell them yes [ ]. I have some files out there now that I am not touching for folks that are behind in rent. I know that I am not going to put them out before Christmas.

Interviewer: And they might pull themselves out.

Mr. George: I'm hoping that they do that. So I have these kinds of things to wrestle with, who is telling the truth? Those are the gray areas.

Interviewer: Do you see New Bern making any more low housing? I know there were some talk or planning to build.

Mr. George: No. They talk that stuff. The reason why is that everybody is for public housing it doesn't cost them anything but no one want them in their yard and next door.

Interviewer: Not in my back yard uh?

Mr. George: Not in my back yard. So I don't beat myself up over that.

Interviewer: Do you have to go to committee meetings?

Mr. George: I get my stuff from HUD. This is an authority.

Interviewer: It's a federal program. How does this work into your preaching? When did you become a preacher?

Mr. George: 1989. I came here in 1984, became a preacher in 1989, did my trial sermon as they call it initial in some denominations, did it in January, in August I was enrolled at Shaw Divinity School in Raleigh, North Carolina. I was up every Saturday on the road at 5:00 in order to be in class at 7:30. Stayed from 7:30 to 5:15 to get three semester hours. I did that for four years and graduated [ ] with 84 semester hours. 90 semester hours you got three masters.

Interviewer: Did someone from St. Peter's call you? How did you find out about that opening?

Mr. George: The Methodist Denomination is different. The Bishop assigned you. I was always Methodist.

Interviewer: Your whole family all generations had been Methodist?

Mr. George: As far as I know. My daddy and his daddy and mother was members of Clinton Chapel AME Zion Church. St. Peter's had fallen on hard time. The Holy Spirit asked the Bishop to send me there so I can restore it. It has been restored beautifully. God blessed me, I restored [ ] Chapel AME Zion, it was built in 1820. I had a good record over in Greenville at [ ] Memorial, it was my first church. I took a reduction in salary to come here.

Interviewer: Do you have an interest in the historic buildings or for the church?



Mr. George: Just for the church. It has made an impact on my life as a youth with the Boy Scout.

Interviewer: Other questions Bernard and Linda was looking for I think you answered about Obama being elected.

Mr. George: I think he is wonderful. The thing is, I voted for him because he is brilliant not because he is black. I copied that from OPRAH. She was the first one I heard say that.

Interviewer: You mention your father and the strong men in your family, are there any particular stories about them that illustrate their strengths and kind of gifts that they pass down? Do you have sons of your own?

Mr. George: I have one. He has my grandfather's middle name, he is Joseph Bland. My daddy was Joseph Garcen, I'm Joseph Clinton and he is Joseph Bland. I was hoping that some of my grandfather would rub off on him. They were men who stood up for themselves, men who I just admired tremendously.

Interviewer: Were they always free men or were they slaves.

Mr. George: They were both free men.

Interviewer: Your grandfather is the one that came from New Bern?

Mr. George: He came from Harlowe.

Interviewer: The quality of their life?

Mr. George: The way they provided for their families the way they protected us, the way they loved us. My granddaddy loved me dearly.

Interviewer: Did he take you fishing?

Mr. George: I didn't like to go fishing. My daddy hunted. I went hunting about twice. I have thought so many times how much more my life has been in terms of things I could have brought that my daddy wanted. He always wanted a boat. I didn't care anything about a boat but I could afford a boat, he couldn't.

Interviewer: It's tough living on the two rivers without a boat.

Mr. George: But he couldn't afford it. Bernard says one thing I can say about my daddy, he never told me a lie. My daddy had cancer. I was in Florida when my sister went to the doctor. They told him he has phosphate cancer was now at a level that he would have to have radiation. If he did that he might have 18 months. I asked my sister what did daddy say. My sister said daddy said "I've had a good life." I thought my daddy never owned a new car. Here he could say I've had a good life and the last car he had was when I gave him my town car when I brought a new car.

Interviewer: What was your mother like?

Mr. George: My mother had plenty of mother wit. Neither one of them is high school graduates.

Interviewer: Is mother wit the same as common sense?

Mr. George: I think it is a level above common sense. I think mother wit is an ability to see things from a distance. This thing here, in memory of my mother Ms. Clemetine C. George my first teacher philosopher and theologian.

Interviewer: And you're taking that from preservation of heritage 38 [ ]. I heard she was a crackerjack woman.

Mr. George: She could recite poetry, she taught us reading, taught us stories, taught us how to pray. She didn't work. If my daddy ran short, he knew to come to see her. She would always say, well let me talk with Gladys, his sister. She would act like she borrowed money to give him. She would say I know he will pay her back. She worked with him, beside him but never tried superseded him. She would build his ego when his ego needed to be built.

Interviewer: They got through eleven children and the depression. I know New Bern was an entirely different place about 25 year ago. Did they ever speak about before the Civil Rights Laws went into effect?

Mr. George: No because we always accepted it as to that is the way the things were to be. When we were growing up, they had city buses in New



Bern, one for whites one came in the black community. For a nickel it came right by our house. When we were "good" mother would give us a nickel and we could ride the city bus. It came by our house, went through Duffyfield came down parked on Middle Street and it would put us off at our house.

Interviewer: What was your home address?

Mr. George: I was little then. 714 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue but we grew up on Cedar Street and that is where most of my sisters and brothers were born.

Interviewer: Did your mother and father say anything about the big fire of 22?

Mr. George: Yes, daddy talked about it a little bit. My mother wasn't up here then. They had to move. They were caught in that fire. Their family, his daddy and mother's family was split. They went with other relatives. They were not split long.

Interviewer: In being a bricklayer I would have thought that he would have build up.

Mr. George: Well you have to have money.

Interviewer: Did he work for other people or did he have his own business?

Mr. George: He worked for other people, he never tried a contract.

Interviewer: Is your mother from New Bern also?

Mr. George: She was from Havelock.

Interviewer: Were there family traditions?

Mr. George: My mother put a premium on family because her mother died at about 6 months. Then she lived with her grandmother and grandfather and they didn't live long so she was from one relative to another. If we got upset, no fighting.

Interviewer: You closed in and took care of each other.

Mr. George: Yes,

Interviewer: You didn't notice when you were growing up about the black and white situation?

Mr. George: You accepted it. I can see it now, but when you grow up in that kind of thing it was no big deal. My mother liked to travel. When we got on the Seashore Bus there was no question about it, you went to the back of the bus. So in that tradition it was no big thing, you grew up with it.

Interviewer: When you came back here with your credentials and your own personally you got right in to shake up the system.

Mr. George: Yes, I thought I owed something back to the community because you can't make any changes until you become continuous that this is not right.

Interviewer: What did you do when you were a kid and what do you do now?

Mr. George: We were meeting a while ago. My sister told my wife that my mother said the reason I like to cut the fool so much is because I was so serious as a child.

Interviewer: First children often are serious I think.

Mr. George: We used to have military police from the base. The white military police would be station at City Hall (the police station) and they would ride with the white cops and the black military police would be station at Craven Terrace and they would ride with the black cops.

Interviewer: What time period are we talking about?

Mr. George: This was in the 1950's.

Interviewer: Why did they have MPs in town?

Mr. George: You know that was against the law but people do that. I guest they had an influx of police at that time. What I use to love. Firecrackers were outlawed. So when we shoot firecrackers the police would chase us. We had clotheslines in the black community at that time. We knew where



the clotheslines were. The police would run into the line and it would knock them back on their butt. We knew the neighborhood. We had a lot of fun. We played ball on the corner and there was a lady name Ms. Julia Fisher. She was very mean. When the ball would go in her yard we would ask Ms. Fisher for our ball. She would say where is it. I got it. It is going right in the cook stove. The bigger boys took a soft ball carved the center out, stuffed it with buck shoot glued it back together let it sit for about two days. Put the ball over in the yard. We asked Ms. Fisher for our ball. She would say where is it? We pointed to the ball. She put the ball in the cook stove and about twenty minutes the ball exploded and she ran out.

Interviewer: She didn't make the connection?

Mr. George: She made the connection and from that point on when we ask Mrs. Fisher for our ball she would say you boys be careful.

Interviewer: What do you do for fun now? You have two children?

Mr. George: Four. I was married for forty years. My wife and I have four children we are the best of friends. She is in Richmond with one of our daughters now. I have three daughters and one son. My baby daughter is an Attorney. She graduated from Howard Law School and got her Masters in Law from American University. She is a lawyer with the Federal Bureau of Transportation in DC. All four of them are college graduates.

Interviewer: What is the other daughter doing?

Mr. George: She works at a bank.

Interviewer: Here in town?

Mr. George: No.

Interviewer: Do any of your children live in town?

Mr. George: Yes, I have one here, the oldest daughter. I don't know what she does. She is like my daddy. She will change jobs in a heartbeat. My daddy's name is on that thing down at First Citizen. My mother said she could look up any day and see my daddy coming home with his tools. She would say what is the matter, you ran out of material? My daddy said "hell no I gave that man the job."

He was the foreman for a guy, the guy was down in Florida and he was paying off. He looked in the white guy's envelope and found out he was making the same thing he was making. He called that guy and told that guy he better come on home because he was not going to be there. Daddy and Mother taught me if they say you are good, let it reflect in your paycheck. A brick mason has to be looking for anybody in construction for the next job.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add? It has been a great pleasure.