

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

DOROTHY NARVELL DOVE

INTERVIEW 207

This is Dorothy Bryan representing the Memories of New Bern Committee.

My number is 200. I'm interviewing Dorothy Dove, interview number 207. This interview is being conducted on May 3, 1993. We are in the office of Dorothy Dove at Oscar's Mortuary, Inc., 1700 Oscar Drive, Pembroke.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Dorothy, would you give me your full name please and your birthdate?

DOROTHY DOVE: Dorothy Narvell Dove. I was born August 19, 1946 in New Bern, North Carolina.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What about your parents? Who were your parents?

DOROTHY DOVE: Oscar Roosevelt Dove and Grace Becton Dove.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Do you remember the names of your grandparents on either side?

DOROTHY DOVE: Willie Becton and Mamie Howard Becton on my mother's side. On my father's side was Phillip Dove and Mary Jane Fenner Dove.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Your father is deceased, is that correct?

DOROTHY DOVE: That's correct.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Now, would you give me the names of your brothers and sisters?

DOROTHY DOVE: I have William Howard Dove and Jonetta Eileen Dove.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Your brother is better known as "Sonny."

DOROTHY DOVE: Right, as Sonny.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Was anybody else living in your home when you were growing up that was a close relative?

DOROTHY DOVE: No, that's it.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Just the family.

DOROTHY DOVE: Just the family members.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Can you tell me something about where you lived when you were growing up?

DOROTHY DOVE: I lived on West Street, 726 West Street. We lived there from I think 1950-1960.

DOROTHY BRYAN: And then where did you live?

DOROTHY DOVE: Then we moved to Pembroke on McKinley Avenue.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What about the games you played as a child?

DOROTHY DOVE: I can't remember many games. I didn't like sports. Hopscotch, hide-and-go-seek, are about the only active-type games. I liked to look at TV and read books.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Do you remember the names of some of your playmates?

DOROTHY DOVE: There was Eleanor Harvey on West Street, there was Jesse Hall and Madalyn Styron and Linda Andrews, Millie White. That was the neighborhood. Joyce Tetterton and Linda Powell, they were my classmates.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Tell me something about school.

DOROTHY DOVE: I went to St. Joseph's Catholic School from grades 1 through 12. The name changed to William Gaston High School I think when I was in the tenth grade. Such a nice foundation for an education. It was a segregated school at one point and later on it was integrated.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Do you remember the year that it was integrated?

DOROTHY DOVE: If I'm not mistaken it was 1960. Mr. Phillip Fecher,

was an accountant here in town, sent his children. When they left the St. Paul's Elementary School, they came to the Catholic High School.

Then the next year, students from Havelock and Jacksonville came to the Catholic school.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What about your teachers? Were there any that you were especially fond of or remember?

DOROTHY DOVE: I remember Sister Frances Xavier. She was nice. And I remember Mrs. Butler. She was the first lay teacher we ever had. She had retired, no, she hadn't retired, but she'd stopped working in the public school system. She taught the seventh and eighth grades at St. Joseph's. She was a nice lady, but we weren't fair to her.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Because she was nice, I can imagine.

DOROTHY DOVE: We'd never had a lay teacher before. We kind of ran over her a little bit.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What about your classmates? Are there any classmates that you remember particularly?

DOROTHY DOVE: Well, my best friend is Joyce Tetterton, and then there's Linda Powell, Joseph Devore and Fletcher Allen. When I graduated, I was the only black girl, and we had three black males.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Do you remember the size of your class?

DOROTHY DOVE: I'm trying to think if it was 10 or 12. It was that small.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What about the variety of subjects that you got there?

DOROTHY DOVE: During that time, you didn't have a choice.

Everyone took Latin, French, Spanish, Geometry, Trigonometry. You know, college preparatory classes they would call them now, but we had to take them. And some way or the other we passed. Now kids have Algebra "1A" and better students are in Algebra 1. They were college preparatory classes, not that they (nuns) prepared many of us I think for college mentally. Academically they might have, but they didn't really push or encourage the black children to attend college.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What about your graduation? What year did you finish?

DOROTHY DOVE: 1964.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What did you do after graduation?

DOROTHY DOVE: I went to college, North Carolina Central University.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What did you major in, Dorothy?

DOROTHY DOVE: Business Education.

DOROTHY BRYAN: So that fitted right in, didn't it?

DOROTHY DOVE: Um huh.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What about church and Sunday School?

DOROTHY DOVE: Well, church was St. Joseph's Catholic Church until the name changed to St. Paul, again through combining both Catholic churches in town. We didn't have Sunday School when I was going to school or church, because we had religion classes every day. I served as an altar server briefly, because church law does not allow girls to be altar servers. It was discontinued in our parish. We had Bible classes, which I taught in high school. That's basically it. We had

a church choir, which we sang in. Church and school was like one, so it was a school/church choir.

DOROTHY BRYAN: And not something that was relegated to one day of the week, religious training.

DOROTHY DOVE: No. You went to school five days and you went to Mass five days.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Was there anything else about your school that I have not touched on or your church that I have not touched on that you can recall?

DOROTHY DOVE: No.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What about illnesses? Did you have any illnesses as a child that you remember vividly?

DOROTHY DOVE: Vividly, I always had a dizzy head. I became dizzy and would faint. We didn't know if the fainting was due to fasting or what. We couldn't eat eight hours before communion - and I received the sacrament daily.. So I don't know. But the time I really became dizzy Ida Devore had tobacco and we chewed some tobacco before we went to church and I was sick. I had to go home from school from that tobacco.

After being home maybe three hours I got well, and then I told a story and they sent me back to school. But I thought I would die, said I'd never chew tobacco again!

DOROTHY BRYAN: You really got sick.

DOROTHY DOVE: I really was sick! I swallowed a lot of the juice.

DOROTHY BRYAN: You didn't know you were supposed to spit the juice out.

DOROTHY DOVE: No I didn't.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Now that was an illness. Is there any memorable event in your childhood that you recall?

DOROTHY DOVE: It was a childhood memory, not necessarily by me. I remember Hurricane Hazel. I think it was Hazel. That was in the fifties. 'Cause I can remember daddy getting in the boat and going over to get my grandmom and my aunt to bring them to where we lived on West Street. Now that I remember. That was a hurricane. I was scared too. Other than that, I can remember one personal event. We had the May Crowning Ceremony in May when we would crown Mary. There was a procession singing and reciting the Rosary; I was the May Crown Queen. I had to make the crown for Mary. Daddy got the flowers for me because we had a rose bush here at the funeral home then. I can remember that.

DOROTHY BRYAN: That would be a memorable occasion I would suspect. I did not ask this at the beginning, but what were the extra curricular activities like at school?

DOROTHY DOVE: At the Catholic school we had very few. We didn't have a basketball team until, well, my high school time we had one. We didn't win many games, but we did have a basketball team. We had a few cheerleaders. I did not go out on the cheerleading team. Mostly everything was church related in school, like the Spring Festival and oratorical contest where you competed with other Catholic high schools, because there were more Catholic schools and high schools during that time. But other than that, we really didn't have a lot of extra

curricular activities.

DOROTHY BRYAN: When was your business started?

DOROTHY DOVE: We started in 1960. My mother and father opened this business, I think it was in January or February of 1960.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Where was it located originally?

DOROTHY DOVE: We originally have always had Oscar's Mortuary right here at 1700 Oscar Drive.

DOROTHY BRYAN: In the early business, do you have any idea about how many employees were involved aside from your mother and father?

DOROTHY DOVE: That's all they had in the early days basically. Dad had a lot of friends who helped him when he first started out in the sixties cause money was short. Mr. Frank Bryant, Charles Jennett, Luke Martin, Grover Moore and Jim Wilson and Joseph Jess always helped him out when he first started.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Okay. Where did your father attend school, Dorothy?

DOROTHY DOVE: He attended elementary school at West Street and St. Joseph's, and he received his Mortuary Science Degree from Gupton-Jones in Nashville, Tennessee.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Did you as a child, or a teenager, work at the business?

DOROTHY DOVE: Yes, we had to work. I worked on Saturdays. We always answered the telephone because it rings at home 24 hours a day whether it's business or "What time is it?" or "Do you know where so and so lives?" I was basically the telephone answerer, collecting

money, keeping records as I still do. Eileen always worked in the business. She started before she had a drivers license. We had a driver for her. Robert Martin would drive her to Jones County, Pamlico, Harlow, and Beaufort to collect burial insurance.

DOROTHY BRYAN: She was how old about? It had to be before she was 16.

DOROTHY DOVE: Yes.

DOROTHY BRYAN: So she was a child then. How did you become a part of the business once you were an adult?

DOROTHY DOVE: As an adult... My father died in '76, and I'd been wanting to return home, and I was given a little push and I came back here and slowly, slowly got involved and it became a full time job.

DOROTHY BRYAN: So where were you before this?

DOROTHY DOVE: I was in Glen Burnie, Maryland teaching school. I taught six years in Maryland and two years in Jones County, North Carolina.

DOROTHY BRYAN: I understand that Eileen was already here when you came.

DOROTHY DOVE: Right, she was here.

DOROTHY BRYAN: And she was the one who encouraged you to come.

DOROTHY DOVE: She encouraged me to come back.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Was she active at that time?

DOROTHY DOVE: She's always been active in the burial insurance part and working on services, but she wasn't as active in the office

then.

DOROTHY BRYAN: About how many employees do you have today, Dorothy?

DOROTHY DOVE: Today we have five full time and about twenty part-time/full time.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Part-time, because you don't have a funeral every day.

DOROTHY DOVE: Right.

DOROTHY BRYAN: It's understandable. About how many do you service annually?

DOROTHY DOVE: Anywhere from 150 to 175.

DOROTHY BRYAN: How does this compare with the early days?

DOROTHY DOVE: The early days were in the 60's when we first started. I think that first year we might have had about 60 calls and it has gradually increased.

DOROTHY BRYAN: It's tripled. Just about tripled.

DOROTHY DOVE: Yes.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What about the cost as compared to the early years?

DOROTHY DOVE: Oh, the cost has tripled too. I was looking back in the 1960 records, they had a lot of funerals, three hundred, four hundred, to eight and nine hundred dollars. If they had a thousand dollar funeral, that was a high price funeral. Now your average funeral is running about thirty-eight or thirty-nine hundred dollars, which includes sometimes about three hundred dollars worth of charges that don't belong to the funeral home.

DOROTHY BRYAN: From what you said I gather that you do sell insurance and you've done this for quite awhile.

DOROTHY DOVE: Right. We used to sell Burial Association, which only went up to \$200. That has stopped. The state's going to eliminate that by 1996. We sell life insurance and make arrangements for pre-need burial expenses where you can actually come in and make the selection and that money is put into a trust account at the bank or funded through an insurance program, but that's a person's choice which way they want to work it. And you do have to have a license for that.

DOROTHY BRYAN: That was my next question. Do you handle the pre-need programs for planning?

DOROTHY DOVE: Yes. That's a marketing element that has come about that's really grown. More and more people are preparing and pre-paying for their funerals.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Now what about cremations? You have to send them away to be done?

DOROTHY DOVE: We handle cremations and cremations are done here in New Bern. There is a crematory in New Bern. We average maybe two cremations a year. The cost is less, but it can be just as expensive depending on what a person selects.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Well, now, what would be expensive?

DOROTHY DOVE: For a cremation?

DOROTHY BRYAN: Yes. What do you have to have done to have an expensive cremation?

DOROTHY DOVE: Sometimes families will have the cremation but

then they want to have a service and use the funeral home facilities and staff for that. Then, too, they might buy an expensive urn. It just depends. We had one that was like \$500 and we've had some that were \$2,000 because they used the complete services of the staff and purchased merchandise. Sometimes they opt to have a viewing of the person dressed and casketed. They may have a private viewing before the cremation.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Okay, now, who is responsible if they want these ashes flown over the Atlantic or some far fetched place and scattered?

DOROTHY DOVE: Well, it just depends. If they want us to do it, we do handle that or you send them U.S. mail, insured, to the person in charge.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Your volume of business has increased, as you said, three-fold. What has been done in the way of updating and improving the facilities?

DOROTHY DOVE: We remodeled the facilities three years ago, I believe, in final completion. We expanded the chapel as far as we could go back. We added a second-story building. The main offices are upstairs. Most of the business is done upstairs. We have a conference room, general office, three private offices. We have two family rooms where families can have visitation upstairs, and flow visitation, not a sit down hour visitation. We have two large family rooms for that. We've added a baby casket room. For the staff, we now have an employees lounge, which we've never had a place to go before.

And the casket room is much larger. We can show twenty-seven caskets

now. We have a lighted display for the dresses and the suits that the person could select. We have an elevator. We have expanded our viewing rooms. We have three viewing rooms. They are large enough for one or two family members to receive visitors.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What about the rolling stock?

DOROTHY DOVE: Rolling stock, we have two Cadillac hearses, two Lincoln limousines, and two Ford station wagons that serve as the lead/flower cars. We have equipment colors of grey and black.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Sonny, as a child, or teenager, you did work for the business?

WILLIAM "SONNY" DOVE: Yes, I worked with my father.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What were your particular tasks as a youngster?

WILLIAM DOVE: Well, I would make removals from the hospitals and from the home at that time and would stand then with him while he was embalming them. Ever since I was about eleven years old I knew the procedure of embalming and I would always watch him.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Okay. So you knew when you finished high school what you were going to do?

WILLIAM DOVE: Well, I knew I was going to embalming school and I had not planned to go to embalming school, I had planned to attend A&T University. But that was changed and I went off to embalming school then.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Where did you attend?

WILLIAM DOVE: I attended American Academy in New York City.

DOROTHY BRYAN: And what year did you officially become, you know,

a full fledged...

WILLIAM DOVE: Embalmer. I'll have to go and look at my license, but it was in the sixties.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Okay. And when did you do your first preparation alone? Do you remember that experience?

WILLIAM DOVE: Yes. I was about thirteen years old and I did not try it anymore until I was about seventeen, my senior year in high school.

DOROTHY BRYAN: And then, of course, after you were licensed, you have worked with your father continually.

WILLIAM DOVE: Right.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What changes have you seen in methods of embalming and other procedures over the years?

WILLIAM DOVE: Well, I haven't seen many changes in methods of embalming, but I've seen changes in the embalming chemicals that we use. They're not as harsh as they were in the beginning. They're milder, but they seem to do just as well a job as the stronger fluids did.

DOROTHY BRYAN: So this is really an improvement over the chemicals over the years. What is the biggest change you have seen?

WILLIAM DOVE: Well, the biggest change I've seen is the new laws that they are making, the things that you have to do in the embalming room; putting in showers in case you get fluid on you, the eye wash system, the air filtering system that we had, and now you have to change it and put the system down at the bottom of the floor. Those corrections

are mandated by OSHA. These changes sometimes cost as much as \$45,000.

DOROTHY BRYAN: In other words, you're saying that the business is regulated more than it was when you first started.

WILLIAM DOVE: Yes, much more.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Can you tell me anything else about the business as you have grown up with it from a small child that I have not covered?

WILLIAM DOVE: No.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Sonny, when was the ground breaking for this building here?

SONNY DOVE: It began in the summer of 1959 that they started digging the foundation and everything. It was approximately that February of 1960 when we moved out here.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Okay. Did you move from West Street, your whole family?

SONNY DOVE: Yes, we moved from West Street to Pembroke.

DOROTHY BRYAN: One other question, who are some of the people that have helped you over the years?

SONNY DOVE: Well, the original builder here, everybody right from this community really. Like James Baucom who was a brick mason.

Luke Martin was the chief engineer and overseer of everything. Mr. Buddy Bay, his name was Latham Saunders, was the head carpenter. Mr. Fred Ernul, was from down Morehead City area, he was one of the head carpenters on the original building.

Several others; Robert Martin, Luke Martin's son, Perk, myself. We all worked down here building the facility, hauling the blocks, helping

pour the cement and everything.

DOROTHY BRYAN: All right. I guess this is all of the information I need. Dorothy, what other businesses did your father have beside from the funeral home?

DOROTHY DOVE: He operated a service station on New South Front Street, a Shell service station. It's presently occupied by the New Bern Towers. When the county/state decided they wanted it, they paid us off and took it. We used to work there. I can vividly remember working on Sundays. I didn't know it was Sunday. I was working angry because I had to be in there and daddy came in fussing, "You sold beer!"

I said, "What was wrong with it?" "It's Sunday!", he said. "Don't you see church is going on?!" I said, "Well, I didn't go to church today, I wouldn't know!" And people wouldn't pay him, and I wouldn't give them credit the next week if they didn't pay the past bill, and they would go complaining to him. And he said, "You don't be like that! You let them have credit!" I said, "Well, if they owe you fifty, pay ten, then you're gonna let them charge fifteen?" It didn't make good sense to me. But anyway, he fired me. He told me, "Go home with your mother." So, I was fired from that job.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Was there one in Frog Pond also that your father owned?

DOROTHY DOVE: He didn't own it. That was before my time. That was back in the forties, so I don't remember about that.

DOROTHY BRYAN: What about Safeway Cabs?

DOROTHY DOVE: It seemed like Daddy drove cabs in the forties.

I remember them talking about that, but he didn't own anything relating to the Cab business.

DOROTHY BRYAN: Okay. Were there any other businesses?

DOROTHY DOVE: He had a lot of rental property which we still have. I think twenty rental units that we operate. And that's the extent of it at this time.

DOROTHY BRYAN: All right. I certainly want to thank you for the information you've given.

DOROTHY DOVE: I thank you. I hope I've given it correctly and enough.

END OF INTERVIEW