

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

BARBARA JEAN HILL LEE

INTERVIEW 1023

This is Dr. Joseph Patterson representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 1000. I am interviewing Barbara Lee at her home at 1813 Beaufort Street in New Bern. The number of the interview is 1023. The date is December 9, 1992.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, Mrs. Lee, it's nice to be here in your home and I thank you very much for letting me come to interview you. I imagine it's a very quiet place out here.

MRS. LEE: Yes, most of the time.

DR. PATTERSON: I wonder if we could start by your telling me your full name, where you were born, who your parents were, your brothers and sisters, where you went to school as a young girl, and about that time.

MRS. LEE: Okay. My name is Barbara Jean Hill Lee. I was a Hill before I got married. My parents were Garner Mae and James Hill. They called him "Booger" Hill. I was born at Good Shepherd Hospital in 1946. I'm number four from the bottom and three from the top as far as the family is concerned. There are six girls. My mother and father and four of us lived in a room with my grandmother on Bern Street upstairs. All of us, my mother and father and four of us. Well, the five of us cause I think my younger sister was the only one born outside.

At 810 Bern Street, that's where we lived for a while. Then we moved to Craven Terrace where we lived. I attended West Street Elementary School and J. T. Barber High School. Since high school, I went into various training programs as a community action technician. I attended East Carolina University, Craven Community College, and Livingston,

and I have not yet received my degree.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you know who your physician was, who delivered you when you were born?

MRS. LEE: Sure, Dr. Disosway.

DR. PATTERSON: Dr. Lula Disosway at Good Shepherd. You remember Dr. Disosway very well?

MRS. LEE: Yes. She was just actually a well known name. I think she delivered everybody in town just about at that time. I recall when I was older, a teenager, my sister beginning to have children, older sisters, and I remember Dr. Disosway. I recall being kind of sickly as a child. During that time we were kind of poor, so you didn't go to the doctor an awful lot. You didn't have stamps where you could go to a doctor for free, but Dr. Disosway did whatever was necessary. I think she delivered my son as well.

DR. PATTERSON: What was it like going to school at West Street School?

MRS. LEE: It was rather special when you think about it. I treasure my life as a child and being poor, because everybody I knew was poor. So it was no problem with that. It was very nice. Our teachers were very, very interested in our development. We all went in the huddle. It was like we were all in the school a big family. We had a lot of respect for our teachers and for our school and our community at that time.

DR. PATTERSON: Who were some of your teachers?

MRS. LEE: There was Miss Jennings, Miss Houston, Miss Carter,

gosh, I forgot. (laughter) Miss Eva Adams was my teacher. I got all the hard teachers, I remember that.

DR. PATTERSON: And you went to West Street school until high school time, is that correct?

MRS. LEE: Yes. I went to West Street until the eighth grade. The eighth grade was at J. T. Barber at that time.

DR. PATTERSON: How was high school?

MRS. LEE: It was great.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you have fun?

MRS. LEE: Oh yes. I was kind of shy and quiet during that time. Some of my friends will come to town now and they see me and they say, "It can't be Barbara Lee!" Cause at that time I was very, very reserved. I was very quiet and kind of stood in the background. I was a majorette and I participated with the band. My girlfriends were active in everything, so I was like hanging around. I remember having a little problem with the fact that we seemed to be a lot poorer than everybody else. That's probably why I was so quiet and reserved. I always wanted to go to college. I had this obsession to go to college.

There's one thing that stands in my mind about my high school days was that I wanted to go to college very bad and I went and talked to a counsellor about how do you go to college and she discouraged me.

That bothers me. Since I have been an adult I have confronted her.

DR. PATTERSON: Why did she do that?

MRS. LEE: She said that if I was able to go to, cause I had older sisters who had finished high school and had gone away, and so what

they did at that time when you graduated and you go away, then you start doing things to help the family. I went and talked to Miss Wooten about how could I possibly go to college because I want to go to college.

She said that it would be too stressful for my parents to send me to college. She said if I got a scholarship or grant or something to go to school, then my parents wouldn't be able to buy me clothes and books and things like that. So she suggested that I become a clerk or cashier or something like that. And I'm really annoyed with her about that!

DR. PATTERSON: You didn't like that advice about not going to college?

MRS. LEE: No, I didn't. I think that's one of the things that encouraged me in my involvement with young people when I was older.

My profession was I worked as a community development as a director of youth development projects, and at that time I made certain that children of underprivileged families were made aware of all the opportunities provided for them and to them. Miss Wooten, I think, meant well, but I just felt that that wasn't fair to me. She even discouraged one of my friends who's now the principal at F. R. Danyus School and told him he couldn't go either. His family didn't have any more money but they had a lot more children, so they knew how to go about getting into college. At that time, in the afternoon after majorette practice, I worked for Attorney Frazier, who had just moved to town, as a receptionist. I recall going to work. Like I said, I was very quiet and so I didn't say very much. He says, "Are you

planning for college?", and I told him what the counsellor had done, and he became furious. He became really furious.

DR. PATTERSON: This is Reginald Frazier?

MRS. LEE: Reginald Frazier. Yes he did. He didn't really have a job for me. I think I met him through my involvement with civil rights. He says now that he saw potential, so he wanted to give me a way of making money. I'd just go and answer his phone and he'd give me a few dollars. So what he did was, he got really upset about that and he wanted to do something about it, so he got some papers for us to fill out to go to college. I had told my parents and they kind of thought it was gonna be hard, so we just left it alone.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, high school was a pretty quiet time for you then, is that right? You were studious, but you were a majorette, so you did some outside things.

MRS. LEE: Oh yes.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, did you finally then go to East Carolina? Was that the next step?

MRS. LEE: No. When I went to East Carolina and to Livingston, I went to Livingston first, it was after I had become an adult. What happened to me, the first year out of high school I got pregnant and I got a job with Clark's Department Store. It just moved here. I told my father and mother. I had good parents. They didn't have any money. We had a lot of love and they taught us all about it. I told my father that I didn't want to get married. When you experiment, I had never experimented with, I don't know if I should say this, sex

or anything like that when I was in high school. Like I said, I was too quiet and reserved. When I got out of high school, I married my high school sweetheart now. We've been together since the ninth grade.

He was going off to college, he went to A&T, so then we experimented and I ended up with a child. I said, "Oh, I'll never go to college now. It's something I always wanted to do." So I told my father, I said, "I'll tell you what, now, I know what it's like, brought up in a housing project and the girls having children, if you don't make me marry him", which I'm sure he would have done, "I'll work real hard and take care of my son." My father said, "Well, Honey, as long as I eat, you'll eat and your son will eat and there will be no problem."

But during that time if you lived in the housing project and you had a child or you had someone extra in your family that it will cost more to live, you know you had to pay more on the rent and I knew my parents couldn't afford it. So I knew I had to work and make up that difference in the rent, and then I had to go off and do well because I didn't want my parents to be burdened with anything.

DR. PATTERSON: So you worked at Clark's store downtown.

MRS. LEE: The new Clark's Department Store that moved out here where it now is.

DR. PATTERSON: Not Clark's Drug Store downtown?

MRS. LEE: No, Clark's Department Store. In the high school I worked with Attorney Frazier. This is amazing. There was a man, and I couldn't remember his name, his name was Mr. Toller, and he had a little candy store out on Broad Street and he gave me a job on the

weekends and after school selling ice-cream. About a year ago the newspaper did an article and featured me about the garbage pick-up, and I was standing in there. He called and he talked with my husband and tell him he remembered me. That was great. I'm glad he remembered me.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, you did these various jobs for quite a while then before going to any college, is that correct?

MRS. LEE: Through high school, yes. What happened was, I got into school. I was very active in civil rights in the sixties, in '64 and '65. Even being reserved, I was a little bit militant you might say when it came to my rights. (laughter) When I finished high school, I got a job with Clark's Department Store and I got sick. Like I said, I was very sickly, very thin. I don't look like that anymore. I lost my job at Clark's. Then community action programs were started up throughout this area and they were doing job interviews, and I went and applied for a job here with the Navy Youth Corps or something like that. By now I'm thinking, okay, this education thing has to go on hold until you can work and attend more to it, do whatever you're gonna do with your life. I was being interviewed for a job here in New Bern and I must did very well, because the gentleman recommended me to go to Raleigh to a training, they call it a Community Action Technician, as a community action technician to organize community groups throughout the state. They were having a work shop or something in Raleigh, and instead of hiring me here he sent me to this training. He recommended me for this training. The training



was provided for college grads working on their master's in community work or social work, like social worker, political science majors, and this was like an intern program. This particular year they were gonna try three people who did not have college degrees along with the ones who had college degrees. It was sort of like a satellite effort. So I went for this interview and was chosen, and that's how I ended up moving on. Thank the Lord. It was fascinating too because I had never been to college. I mean, to a hotel. This big dome hotel in Raleigh called the Sir Walter...

DR. PATTERSON: Yes, I remember.

MRS. LEE: I thought it was the grandest hotel in the world!

DR. PATTERSON: It was pretty good for a while, for a long time.

MRS. LEE: I hadn't never seen anything like it. But anyway, they sent me there. This gentleman drove me there to be interviewed and I was chosen.

DR. PATTERSON: So what did that involve?

MRS. LEE: What happened was, it was an extensive training in sociology, political science, this was a new thing coming out, community organization, psychology. The instructors came from North Carolina Central University is what it is called now. It was North Carolina Central. The instructors came from there and Duke. We were trained extensively twenty-four hours a day. We were always on call in the area of community development. We had to go through what was called a sensitivity drills where they took us to a retreat, Quail's Roost, something like that. They took us there and they had a

psychologist to come in and had work sessions with us to see if we had what it took to work in the communities and bounce-off and relate.

They taught us well in public speaking. They developed lots of skills that I didn't know I had, cause I didn't speak very much, I was very quiet. I did very well as a matter of fact. I graduated with honors.

DR. PATTERSON: You came back to New Bern then?

MRS. LEE: No. Then when I finished my intern program, they hired me at the North Carolina Fund. Incidentally, there were several of those college grads working on their masters who didn't complete the program. It was a very extensive program and intense. They found out that if you were a little bit too sensitive or if you didn't have what it took to endure the kind of training that we had that, we call it "washed out", so you didn't complete the training and they just sent you on home. They didn't send me home. Then I was hired by the North Carolina Fund to help set up all community action programs throughout this state. Then I was assigned to Salisbury, North Carolina. I was assigned there, and then they enrolled me in Livingston College there to get the kind of background training they wanted, and we took courses over at Catawba.

DR. PATTERSON: When did you come back to New Bern then?

MRS. LEE: My husband was in Viet Nam and he came back and we got married and I came back to New Bern. Or I got transferred back to Fayetteville actually. My husband was stationed in Fayetteville.

Then when I came to New Bern to visit my parents, somebody here hired me, so I stayed here. But it was still the same work that I did.

DR. PATTERSON: Who hired you here?

MRS. LEE: A Jim Godwin was his name with, I think it was Coastal Community Action.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you then go to East Carolina?

MRS. LEE: I attended East Carolina on my own shortly after that.

DR. PATTERSON: How long did you go to East Carolina?

MRS. LEE: One year.

DR. PATTERSON: And you got your degree there?

MRS. LEE: No, I have not received my degree. I need to go to school about another year and a half.

DR. PATTERSON: So you were there four years you say.

MRS. LEE: I need to go another year and a half.

DR. PATTERSON: But you did go four years? How many years did you go to East Carolina?

MRS. LEE: I only went there one year.

DR. PATTERSON: One year. Let's backtrack a little bit and let me ask you what memories you have of growing up in Craven Terrace. What was it like to be a child in a housing development?

MRS. LEE: It's not like it is now I can assure you. When you stop and look back on it, it was quite rewarding. It was okay. It teaches you some very strong values in how to make it in the world with nothing. My mother was kind of protective. I feel real fortunate to have my mom and dad, because most people at that time didn't have a mom and a dad. So I had my mom and dad, and my mom worked over on Avenue C. I was an adult before I knew where Avenue C was. I knew

my mom worked over there for someone cleaning. My dad did an assistant brick, like a laborer with brick mason. There were six of us and my sister had had a son and my parents raised him, so there was seven.

My mother was, like I said, was very protective. We lived on one end of the building. We lived at W1A2 Craven Terrace. It was one of the larger apartments. What happened was, we lived here and on the end was a lady named Miss Dot and she had about seven children.

She was very protective, so that meant we couldn't go around this corner unless my mom said we could go around the corner, and Miss Dot's kids couldn't come out. But we could play together sometime. Everybody in the unit sort of looked out for each other. When my mother and father were gone, everybody looked out for each other. There was the lady across the street. If something was to happen, you'd go and you tell her.

DR. PATTERSON: It sounds like a pretty good place to live.

MRS. LEE: Yeah, it was. It was great. My aunt lived in one building. We knew everybody. Anything that happened to anybody in the building, everybody was there for them.

DR. PATTERSON: There was no crime like there is now?

MRS. LEE: Oh no, no. It was just a lot of children. It was very peaceful. My childhood was fun. There were lots of children to play with. Like I said, nobody had anything. I always wanted a bicycle. It seemed like my girlfriends were on welfare. They didn't have a father, but they were on welfare. They dressed well and they seemed to have a lot of money. Those of us whose worked, the parents

worked, were seemed poorer than the ones that were welfare. (laughter)

DR. PATTERSON: That was upsetting, wasn't it?

MRS. LEE: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: Was your father able to support such a large family?

MRS. LEE: Oh yes, I mean, you'd be surprised. Well, he did the best he could. You'd be surprised at how my father and people like him in those days were able to manage money. I mean, they could make something out of nothing. My father had all of us and he worked. In the winter time, often time he didn't work, but he was never home because he was always out somewhere trying to make it, like a handyman or someplace. He always did a little extra things for people. Might as well say, he'd go run to the store for folks. Some of my sisters thought it was kind of degrading that people who were a little better off, my father would go to the store for them or cut wood for them or something like that. But that's what he did. Oh man, I tell you he could make a dollar, he could stretch a dollar like you wouldn't believe. Like in the summer time when he worked most, we call it folded his money. He's pinched it off and he was able to provide us the kind of things we needed.

DR. PATTERSON: How many children do you have?

MRS. LEE: I only have one.

DR. PATTERSON: This is your son born some time ago.

MRS. LEE: I wanted six, but I only have one.

DR. PATTERSON: You spoke of being involved in civil rights and

this is very important to New Bern. This program that we're involved in right here is anxious to know what all happened in New Bern during the civil rights movement and how New Bern made out and whether it did itself proud or whether there was a lot of trouble. I wonder if we could talk about that now. If you could tell me how you got involved in civil rights and what it was like in New Bern before the civil rights movement, during the movement, then we'll talk about after the movement, and your personal involvement.

MRS. LEE: Before the civil rights movement, I think it was like everybody knew their place and tried to stay in it. When I grew up, we seldom ever saw anybody white unless it was the insurance man or Mr. Williams. It's a man's name. Mr. Williams used to go buy blankets and things and ride in his car and sell it to people in the housing projects, and that was basically all we saw. When you went downtown, my sister held our hand and I could go shopping. We'd never go downtown unless my older sister or my mom or somebody took us. I never will forget we walked through Broad Street and there was a white lady that sit on the porch. She wore a sun visor. It was somewhere near a church.

You know St. Luke Hospital and then across the street down there, there were houses and people, you know, be sitting on the porch. Other people usually, like if you see white folks sitting on the porch, well, we thought, we'd go on the other side of the street, cause we were intimidated and I guess they were intimidated by us. I remember as a little girl this lady always saying, "Hi children. How you doing today?" I was telling somebody about this one time when I was speaking,

and I said that you know, it's just the way things were, not necessarily that it's the way people wanted things to be all the time. At that time we couldn't see it. We would be afraid to say hello back to her because we were taught that you didn't say anything. Like I said, you hold hands and then you walk straight downtown and you turn at the Williams and you'd go into the stores where you belong and you stay on your side. I'll never forget she had a swing and she was swinging and she used to wear a sun visor and it had like sun, you know, like it was blue or something, and she would always say, "Hi children. How are you?" (laughter)

DR. PATTERSON: But you were not allowed to speak back to her?

MRS. LEE: No. I'd do one of these numbers or wave at her or something like that, but we didn't say anything.

DR. PATTERSON: When you went downtown, did you have to act differently from other people?

MRS. LEE: Yes, you had to stay in your place.

DR. PATTERSON: What does that mean?

MRS. LEE: Well, our place was that we didn't touch anything. If we wanted a hotdog, you'd stand at the far corner of Kress Department Store. As you walked in it had the lunch counter in the front and you had to stand over on the side and order your hotdog or something and take it out of the store if you wanted to eat it. They had a lunch counter in the back. You knew you're not suppose to go back there.

If you wanted to buy something, you had to keep your hands to yourself, because if you touched something they would assume you were stealing

it.

DR. PATTERSON: What did you think about all of that as a child?

MRS. LEE: Well, as a very young child I was kind of hostile about it, so it was challenging to touch something or to do something that would defy the rule. Like I said, when my mom worked on Avenue C, we didn't belong on Avenue C. None of us lived over that way, so we didn't go there. I never will forget one time one of my sisters got sick and we had to run to Avenue C to get my mom. We didn't have a phone or anything like that. We had to go to the back door, frightened of the fact that we're gonna step on this porch, you know, because we know we didn't belong in the white neighborhood. Then we got a little older and kind of a dare devil. Actually, we didn't come over this way. If we were from the projects, we stayed in the projects.

People from over here stayed in their place somewhat. My girlfriend and I were running and playing around somebody's bike. I can't remember if it was over near National Avenue or what, but they would go across this fence and steal apples and somebody busted us. We were told that they would kill us if they saw us in the yard. Like I said, I stand by the bikes and just go crazy at the fact that they were stealing apples. (laughter) I only did that once. I was too paranoid to go back again.

DR. PATTERSON: You said earlier that very few white people came into your neighborhood when you lived in Craven Terrace. You just didn't see white people then unless you went downtown, is that right?

MRS. LEE: That's right. We didn't have a car or anything, so



we didn't go any place but where we could walk. My grandmother lived over on Cedar Street and Bern Street so we'd go over there. We didn't go too far beyond that.

DR. PATTERSON: Then as you grew older and became involved in civil rights, how did this all develop?

MRS. LEE: Well, the movement had begun. During that time, we weren't listening or paying attention. Earlier, in '62, our pastor, his name was Rev. Hill and Rev. Fisher, the demonstrations in Greensboro had begun, so he had organized sit-ins here in New Bern. They used to have meetings up at my church, and I was like too young.

DR. PATTERSON: Which church was this?

MRS. LEE: St. Peter's. They used to do picketing downtown. So I was sort of aware that this was going on. I can't remember what set it off right now in '64.

DR. PATTERSON: You were just in your teens then.

MRS. LEE: Umhuh. I was in the eleventh grade in '64. But in '62, my oldest sister was involved. So I was too young then. That was like eighth or ninth grade. Anyway, in '64, my girlfriend said "They're having a meeting about civil rights over at the Guildfield Church" and said, "Come with me." She went to Guildfield Church. So I went with her. Like I said, I was very quiet. I didn't say anything. She said, "Let's go." I went to Guildfield Church and Rev. Nixon, Buckshot Nixon, and Rev. Alexander were there. They started telling us about the demonstrations that were going on throughout the state and throughout the South. It became fascinating to me in particular.

I got very interested in it. First we were going there because they were giving us free cookies and punch. (laughter) It just became an obsession with us. They started talking to us. During that time people didn't talk to you about who you are, your rights, and your abilities.

Like I said, the guidance counsellor discouraged us. But now, all our teachers weren't like that. Our teachers always taught us that we had to do the best we could do and be the best we could be. We have to be better than. They always motivated us. I remember Miss Carter, Mr. Attmore, Miss Adams, people who were just on us, Miss Williams and Miss Fields and Mrs. Faison. They would say, "You must learn this, you must learn that." They would say that so that you can compete in the world. Because things are gonna be tougher for you; you can't do this and you can't do that. So we felt limited.

But I came up in a rebellious time. Anyway, they were talking about it to us and motivating us and I just became motivated instantly and wanted to know more. So I was one of the ones who went out, there were just a few of us in the beginning, and just spread it.

DR. PATTERSON: Were you involved actively then in this process from that time on?

MRS. LEE: Yes.

DR. PATTERSON: What sort of things happened in New Bern during the sixties when the civil rights act came into being and the equal rights?

MRS. LEE: When my sisters were in it, they had this problem at Moore's and they targeted Moore's Bar-be-que. It used to be where

the Scotchman is now. I'm sure you remember.

DR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MRS. LEE: We had to go to the back door. So they targeted Moore's Bar-be-que. When we came along, there was a place called A & W Rootbeer Stand and Kress's Department Store. There was a Holiday Inn where we were not allowed to enter. So we organized and we organized very strong. There were about four or five hundred of us. We would have silent marches. We were following Martin Luther King's teachings and we would have silent marches through our own community to motivate the interest at first. Then we began to get permits, like, whatever we needed to do. We'd be harassed a little bit. But you know fortunately, I can't recall,, any harassment by whites in New Bern.

I remember somebody said there was a group one night. I'm jumping all around as I think about it. (laughter) I stood about this one particular night that we had this great big march. Now this is something in my mind. We had organized marches. We had silent marches and went downtown, like, every day.

DR. PATTERSON: Would this be hundreds of people?

MRS. LEE: Hundreds of people, yes. We'd have silent marches and we'd just humbly walk through town. That's all we'd do. Just walk downtown. We'd have signs. We'd get permits. We'd have Rev. Hickman and Rev. Nixon and Mr. Vails and Rev. Alexander. These were the leaders that I recall. We were called NAACP Youth Council at that time and I was like, vice-president or something like that. So what my dad and them used to say, "Okay. Now, I know that this looks like

something that can't be stopped in you, marching and getting involved.

Why do you have to be in the front?! Get in the middle! Get in the middle of the line." (laughter) I don't know why I had to be in the front of the line. Get in the middle of the line! But anyway, we marched downtown. I recall that Rev. Nixon had a son named Emerson and as we walked

by one store once, somebody snatched him out of the line and was questioning him. I don't know who. They say that somebody snatched Emerson out of the line. I don't recall anybody doing anything to us, except one night when we had a demonstration. This was a big night.

This is when we had gotten bigger. We used to picket, and we went downtown to the Holiday Inn.

DR. PATTERSON: Is that the Holiday Inn on the Neuse River?

MRS. LEE: Yes. We went down to the Holiday Inn. We had lots of people. We had four or five hundred of us that evening. There was a gentleman that had a Texaco gas station on the corner or something.

There were younger people in the back of us, younger folks, you know, like, younger than I was. We thought we were older cause we were 16 or 17. We were old enough to go to jail. During that time, if you weren't old enough to go to jail, you weren't hip. (laughter) Anyway, he let loose his water hose on the younger children and they scattered.

They got frightened and they ran. As they ran, they realized they were downtown by themselves. And you see, we'd always been taught if you go downtown by yourself, somebody'll kill you. They'll lock you up. You're not suppose to be downtown by yourself. So that was

a little chaotic. I remember him doing that. But other than that, I don't recall anybody in New Bern doing anything, spitting on us and everything like that like they used to do in '62. And I don't think they were New Bernians. I really don't think they were New Bernians.

DR. PATTERSON: So, there was no true outbreak of violence during this time?

MRS. LEE: No. The only time we anticipated an outbreak of violence, we were gonna leave from the church that night. We met over at Rue Chapel Church, in the basement of Rue Chapel Church and at Star of Zion. We were gonna leave from the church and march to the A & W. We were going to the A & W Rootbeer Stand each night and they would arrest us. We'd get out and we'd go back. Cause they had a big sign, if you recall, that said "Colored window." Did you know where that was, A & W Rootbeer Stand? It was across the street from the bus station.

DR. PATTERSON: Yes, I remember that.

MRS. LEE: I think now it's a biscuit company or biscuit store. What's the name of that place? You know, Ipock's own it over there. Okay. It's right across from where the bus station used to be. Anyway, it was called A & W Rootbeer Stand and there was a restaurant. We would go there and just sit on their premises and they would have us arrested, and we'd go downtown very peacefully and let them us arrest us. They didn't know what to do with them, so then they'd let us out and we'd come back and we'd organized and we'd march down there again.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you have sit-ins in places downtown?

MRS. LEE: They had sit-ins in '62 in Kress's Department Store

and we had sit-ins at the Holiday Inn. They arrested us. We walked into it very hurriedly, very quietly, and sat on the floor while people are sitting around eating and stuff like that. We'd just sit on the floor.

DR. PATTERSON: Did the white people treat you decently during that time?

MRS. LEE: Yes, they did. I must admit they did mostly. Sometimes people were mean to them. Like I was getting ready to tell you before, I keep jumping all around, was the night that we anticipated problems from the white community. We didn't have white people come and try to bomb us. They did try to bomb our church and they did something to some cars in front of our church at a meeting. Somebody did, at St. Peter's Church.

DR. PATTERSON: They tried to bomb your church?

MRS. LEE: Yeah. I think Oscar Dove's car was one that was bombed or something was done to it.

DR. PATTERSON: At church?

MRS. LEE: Yes. At our church, at St. Peter's Church. They were having a meeting, a NAACP meeting.

DR. PATTERSON: I think I heard something about the funeral parlor being damaged too.

MRS. LEE: I don't about the funeral parlor being damaged, but I know there were cars in front of our church. They were having a meeting and somebody tried to do something to the cars in front of it.

DR. PATTERSON: Did they throw fire bombs?

MRS. LEE: I don't know what they did, but they did something to the cars that were parked on the outside of our church. It was some of those cars that were out there. But whatever it was, it was not very well done.

DR. PATTERSON: How did the black people feel about the white people during that time? Were they angry? Did they hate them or what?

MRS. LEE: We never really evaluated our feelings at that time. It was just, we were taught to hate them, dislike them, or to fear them actually.

DR. PATTERSON: When Martin Luther King was killed, that was a bad time everywhere. What happened in New Bern?

MRS. LEE: I was in Salisbury. I was at Livingston. I can only tell you what I heard happened in New Bern.

DR. PATTERSON: Tell me what you heard.

MRS. LEE: I heard that there was a protest and the people started rioting here, but they only tore up their own communities, which they did all over the place. They just tore up their own community. I came here because, like I said, I worked for the state and we organized programs here. I was like a field representative, one of them. They'd send you to trouble areas because I was suppose to have the kind of training that made me able to handle situations like that better. So I was sent back here at that time after they had to calm us down in Salisbury. The mayor and some of the people in community action were wearing black arm bands and they were trying to quell the situation

here so that people wouldn't get really very...

DR. PATTERSON: Do you recall people telling you that it was fairly much under control in New Bern or that it was a very bad time?

MRS. LEE: The damages were done in the black communities. For instance, there was a man down on Miller Street, we called him the coal man. He sold coal and we used to burn coal in our stoves in the project. He had a little candy store. Been knowing him all my life, never knew his name. They tore up his building, his store.

DR. PATTERSON: This was in the black community?

MRS. LEE: Yeah. He was down on Miller Street near Star of Zion. He was the coal man. He used to sell coal out of there. I remember them saying they tore up his place and somebody else had a little fish market. In the little stores that bordered the black community that were white owned, they tore it up.

DR. PATTERSON: So this coal man was white?

MRS. LEE: Yes, he was a white man. But he never bothered us. You didn't say anything to him but "I want a bag of coal" kind of thing. They didn't bother Pete's grocery, Mr. Pete, I don't know if you remember him.

DR. PATTERSON: How did it go with school integration in New Bern?

MRS. LEE: I think the first year that Andrew went over there, it had to be in '65. It was while I was still in school cause they were asking some of us to go.

DR. PATTERSON: Where was this? Where'd he go?

MRS. LEE: New Bern High.



DR. PATTERSON: Andrew is who?

MRS. LEE: Andrew is a guy I knew that was in our civil rights movement that went to New Bern High. He was supposed to graduate high school in '66 from our school, cause he was a year behind me. When Rev. Nixon and them were talking to people about sending their kids to New Bern High when integration begun, nobody wanted to go to New Bern High. I kind of like the sense of pride that you got from black schools. I have a problem with the integrated system personally.

DR. PATTERSON: When it began, there was reluctance then?

MRS. LEE: Oh yeah. It was fear.

DR. PATTERSON: There was reluctance then on the part of the blacks to go? Was it fear?

MRS. LEE: Fear, yes. We had never been among whites and things were happening all over everywhere when black kids integrated schools and they'll beat them up and do things to them. I don't think Andrew had a big problem, this guy I knew. He went there. He was a good student. I just recall Andrew going. There might have been others, but Andrew is the only one I remember that went to New Bern High at that time.

DR. PATTERSON: You did not go?

MRS. LEE: Oh no.

DR. PATTERSON: Could you have gone?

MRS. LEE: Oh yes. I didn't want to go.

DR. PATTERSON: Because of fear?

MRS. LEE: No. Mine was because of a sense of loyalty and love

for my own school. It's like that alma mater kind of thing at J. T. Barber. I was a senior, so I wanted to graduate from J. T. Barber.

DR. PATTERSON: How long did that choice remain before integration became a fact?

MRS. LEE: That it was districted?

DR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MRS. LEE: Just a few years. It was a couple of years maybe.

DR. PATTERSON: During that time you could decide to go to the white schools or stay where you were?

MRS. LEE: At that time they were just testing, just trying to get somebody. They knew that it was going to be stressful for anybody who chose to go there.

DR. PATTERSON: When integration finally became an accomplished fact and everybody went to New Bern High School, what happened then?

MRS. LEE: Is this in my opinion?

DR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MRS. LEE: I think something was truly lost in integrated sense. I attribute integration to the lack of motivation and interest that black people have for themselves, their sense of pride, and the sense of togetherness that you had from going to an all black school. Like, I went to school, and in my school we had teachers who related to us and our problems at that time. I think integration sort of stripped us of something, a sense of pride. Because what we did was just blended. I think it should have been, or could have been, handled differently.

It's like taking away some of your culture and some of who you are when you go into a school that they didn't teach you anything about yourself. There were very few if any black teachers that were there, so black kids more or less got into a situation and became melted.

I loved the fact that Mr. Booker could call my mother or father or Mr. Attmore could yell at me and tell my pastor. I liked that. I liked the fact that when I went to school, even though my history books didn't say anything about my contribution to the history, there were black people who told us about the struggle and gave us a sense of pride and a sense of belonging and they gave us a sense of motivation.

I think that when they went to integrated systems it just seemed to of done something. I just don't know what. They had problems in the beginning. It was always that difference. It seems that our children began to lose their interest in learning, like, they were just way behind. I guess if you look at the stats you'll see that we didn't seem to excel well in those stressful situations and that conditions.

It just didn't seem to work in my opinion. I like the idea, and I fought for my right to choose, but not necessarily that I wanted to for myself. I wanted to have the right to sit down at the lunch counter if I wanted to,

a right to go to New Bern High if I wanted to. Because at New Bern High they had better credited teachers, they had better books. I mean, when they finished their books, they sent them to us and they're outdated and they give them to black schools. Things like that. I wanted us to have equal opportunities for education, but I didn't

necessarily have to go to school with people or live in their neighborhoods. I liked living in black neighborhoods and knowing my neighbors. It was like, that's just for me. But I want my son, if he chose to go to New Bern High, that he could go to New Bern High. You know, one of those kinds of things. I don't believe in force busing.

DR. PATTERSON: You wanted the choice but you wanted the choice to be separate too if you chose.

MRS. LEE: If I choose to be.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you recall that there was any real violence at the school?

MRS. LEE: There were situations at the school when I moved back here that we had to deal with. There was something I never will forget. There was a big demonstration. They would have an assembly. This was after I moved back. The mayor can probably tell you more about it cause his memory is probably better than mine. I believe Michael was at school at that time, his son. Somebody had a Confederate flag. And see, our kids were sensitive, and so they'd probably jump off at the mention of anything.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, you said that your son said to you that he couldn't do this.

MRS. LEE: Yes, he'd use it as an excuse; like, if things don't go right for him, white people did this or white people did that to me. I think that those of us as leaders have perpetuated, and that is to allow our kids who were brought up in integrated situations to

use the color of their skin as an excuse not to excel. I tell my son, "White folks, they never done nothing to you. Nothing, nothing, nothing. You have the right to do anything that you want to, and you cannot use it as an excuse, they did this to me cause I'm black or they did this." People say our people are selling drugs on the street corner because they can't get jobs or because they hold us back. That's not true. When we were brought up we were poor and didn't have a thing and could not get jobs because of the color of our skin, we didn't sell drugs and didn't do crime. We were just taught, okay, strive, strive, do better, do better, over come, over come, that kind of thing.

So I don't allow that to be a problem for me. I was gonna tell you about this one night that we had a demonstration. I bet we were about five hundred strong. Somebody came and told us not to come down to the A & W that night because there were some people from Vanceboro.

They say Vanceboro, I don't know where they came from, but they were a group I'd never seen before. I mean, they were the most frightening looking white folks I'd ever seen. They were dirty and big and they had sticks and things and they were gonna hurt us if we came downtown.

They were lined up all down that side of Broad Street where the A & W Rootbeer Stand. That was a cute little wooden restaurant on the corner there where the Scotchman, or where the One Stop is, on the corner of Broad by Anderson Drug Store. Anyway, so they were all in the parking lot everywhere and the

A & W was next to that. They came and told our advisors not to bring the children downtown, now, this is frightening, cause they were gonna

hurt us. They were gonna kill us and beat us up like they were doing on TV. Then the word got around this community. That's why I know that when push comes to shove, people will rally. Got around in the black community. Oh, in Dodge City. Do you remember Dodge City that were gonna kill us if we came downtown. People from everywhere, black people from everywhere, lined up across that street from that church, down by the bus station and the newsstand. They were packed! They had guns and they had sticks. Black folks. My mother and father were frightened. I will never forget, cause we lived across the street from the church where we met, people were taking their guns and put them under the chairs in my parent's house. My mama was trying to get me to not go downtown because they had told us that these white folks were down there waiting for us and they went to see if they were there. They had guns. You know, the white men with the rifles in their trucks and they had sticks and they were gonna beat us up they say. Well, our advisors had to decide whether or not we were gonna go down there, and they decided that we were. So we went three deep this time. We usually marched two deep, but we went three deep and we locked our arms and we marched downtown. We marched down to the A & W. I never forget turning that corner and the police would escort us, turning that corner on, what's that short street beside that Shell station, to go down Broad Street, and I remember turning that corner and seeing all those white people over there. I've never seen that many white folks anywhere, especially that looked like that. I learned differently though as I got an adult, that the mean white people came

from the rural areas. We never saw any white people in town. They said they were coming from Vanceboro, so we knew they was gonna kill us because they were known to be Klan neighborhood in Vanceboro. When we turned that corner, it was frightening but it was like a sense of pride. It was like no way you'll stop us, you got to kill us. Cause Rev said to us, they said to us, okay, this is dangerous maybe, you might not want to go. The parents were standing around, but it was like, "You have to go. You can't let this overcome you." I'll never forget. It was like spiritual. It really was. It was kind of frightening in that if something, if one thing go wrong, if somebody throw a stone or somebody hit me or hit us, the people across the street, it's gonna be a mess cause their gonna fight if they try to hit us.

We knew that was just dangerous and it was like a spiritual kind of thing. We were crying. There were tears coming out of our eyes when we had prayer in the church that night. I'll never in my life forget that. That was something. It makes me emotional when I think about it. We marched and we went there very, very quietly. As we walked through the crowd of white people, they moved out of the way. They didn't do anything. Lots of people standing on the other side. It was just God. I guess everybody knew that if one thing happens, you know, it's gonna be a mess in this town and these kids in the middle are gonna be the ones dead probably. I remember this real big fat, real red looking white man, and I remember being frightened and challenged by him. We just kept right on walking. He had a big stick in his hand, but they didn't hit us. They saw us coming and they just

moved out of the way. They just moved back. The people on the other side, you could look over there and the tears would roll down your eyes to see how much support you had. And there weren't just black people on the other side, there were white people on the other side down near the church, but they put themselves in their car because I guess they were frightened that there were so many black people.

They were afraid of us like we were afraid of them. We went into A & W, those of who could. They locked the door so we couldn't get in. So we surrounded the grounds and sat on the ground. They arrested us. The bus station was across the street, and Reginald Frazier walked across the street. We were supposed to sit down and let them pick up everyone of us, but Reginald Frazier walked across the street. I'll never forget, he's always grandstanding. He stood and the traffic stopped and he just did like this, cause he didn't want us to get hurt.

There were so many of us and it was such a tense kind of thing and that's why he asked us to get up. If the cops had to pick us up one at a time they might get frustrated and start beating up on us, okay.

But I only remember a cop jabbing us once and that was another time. He just jabbed with that stick. But Reginald did this, so we got up and loaded the buses. They had city buses. There were so many of us they had to arrest us in buses. Those of us who were leaders, they put us in the police cars. They took us downtown and put us in the basement of City Hall I believe it was. Now that I think about it, it was City Hall. It was dungy down there. They couldn't put us in jail. They kept asking our age and we wouldn't tell them, because



if you weren't sixteen they couldn't arrest us. We started having prayer and singing. That was a beautiful time.

DR. PATTERSON: Now that all that is behind us and we look at things since then and today, how is it now?

MRS. LEE: Well, there's still some problems now. There's still prejudiceness, but on both sides. There's still subtle ways of discrimination I believe. If I have to say, on a whole, I think things are a whole lot better. Oftentimes I'll sit and I'll watch little kids play, black kids and white kids play, and then I'll thank God for Martin Luther King's dream, for it has come to pass. It really has. I think on a whole things are a lot better. I really do.

DR. PATTERSON: It's better this way than it used to be before integration started?

MRS. LEE: Yes. I think it's better. Like I said, I didn't even know no white folks and now I've got some buddies.

DR. PATTERSON: Let's shift to something else. You are a member of the Board of Aldermen. Now, do you call yourself an alderman, an alderperson, or an alderwoman, or an alderlady?

MRS. LEE: I call myself an alderwoman. But it doesn't matter. I am a member of the Board of Aldermen.

DR. PATTERSON: How long have you been on the board?

MRS. LEE: This is my second term. It's been about five years.

DR. PATTERSON: Would you talk a little about the evolution of blacks coming into city government? The Board of Aldermen now has how many blacks on it?

MRS. LEE: Three aldermen and a mayor.

DR. PATTERSON: Three members and the mayor. When did all this begin?

MRS. LEE: I don't know what year. I recall the mayor running for the Board of Aldermen and I ran for the Board of Aldermen many times. I was only running because everybody asked me to. I was kind of popular, so they figured my name would get votes. We didn't expect to win. I was very young. I don't remember what year it was. But it became interesting because one of the things they motivated us in NAACP Youth Council was registration and voting. So I've always been involved in that process ever since I was not old enough to vote. They asked the mayor to run for alderman, and then he ran for alderman and he won I believe. After a couple of tries he won alderman. Then they would run me. Miss Ella (Bengel) and I became friends running for the Board of Aldermen. Of course, I didn't expect I'd beat Miss Ella. She was very nice.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you recall when the first black was elected to city government on the board or the mayor?

MRS. LEE: I don't recall what year that was, but I know it was Mayor Morgan. Well, they said that many years ago I. P. Hatch was on the city council, but since then I think the next person was Mayor Morgan.

DR. PATTERSON: Mayor Morgan was mayor before his present term.

MRS. LEE: Umhuh. He was alderman and then he was mayor.

DR. PATTERSON: Has this made a difference to the black community,

to the blacks in town, having such great representation on the city board?

MRS. LEE: I think they feel a sense of accomplishment, yes.

DR. PATTERSON: Has it helped the community?

MRS. LEE: I guess that depends on who you're talking to. I think that it has. I think that we have done well. We can't do everything.

We are perceived in our community as someone who's suppose to make everybody's light bill go down and fix everybody's house, give them a job. It sort of depends on how we're perceived. Because aldermen, most people in our community at one time didn't know what the word meant. They didn't have any particular interest. It seemed to me they'd say, "Well, they're gonna do what they want to do, or they are in charge." It was all white boards for many years, so their interest in development were in the neighborhoods or with the things they knew about. Black folks and poor folks and black communities, they didn't know anything about and so they didn't show a whole lot of interest in them. That's one of the reasons that our communities are so deteriorated. If over the years someone had put a few dollars in street improvement or house improvement, then our problems would not be as bad now as they are, like we have with the collapsed sewer pipes over here, and things like that. So I think that the fact that we're there has sort of changed the philosophy maybe of our community in that even though we're interested in preserving the historic value of our city and fixing up downtown for tourist, we also care about the people who live here in this town and their quality of life.

DR. PATTERSON: The black people I would think are pretty proud of this accomplishment.

MRS. LEE: On a whole I think they are.

DR. PATTERSON: Has politics in this regard been a clean affair or has it been dirty? Has getting blacks into city office been difficult? Have there been underhanded efforts to keep them out?

MRS. LEE: It was, yes. Oh yes. (laughter) It's not as bad now as it has been. Like I said, I ran before. I remember one year that I ran and the mayor ran and it must have been somebody else that was black was trying. A group of whites, I almost said his name, I can't remember his name, we knew who it was, they said originated out of Williams Restaurant, some people were sitting around and they circulated a paper about us; about black folks are gonna take over.

It says Barbara Lee was a radical because I was involved in civil rights and because I worked with community action. They were saying nasty things about us, yeah. They'd circulate letters to make sure that they motivated the white vote against us. The reason we were unable to be elected was because of the color of our skin. That's why we had to have the re-districting, so that it would give us a better opportunity to be elected.

DR. PATTERSON: That was about as bad as it got though? I mean, nothing worse than that?

MRS. LEE: No, nothing that I can recall. I ran against Miss Ella, so it was always very...

DR. PATTERSON: Well, let's look at something else. Let's look

at some things about the black community as a whole. You talked about your neighborhood. Do you remember businesses in the black community as you grew up? What were some of the businesses out here? You didn't go downtown very much. Did you have places in your area where you could buy things?

MRS. LEE: We had Miss Reese's. I don't know if you remember Miss Reese.

DR. PATTERSON: No.

MRS. LEE: You don't?! That was like a supermarket out on Broad Street.

DR. PATTERSON: What's the name of it?

MRS. LEE: Miss Reese's Grocery is all I remember. You could get a pound of bacon and get it wrapped up like that. Then there was Haye's Food Center.

DR. PATTERSON: That was run by whites, Haye's Food Center.

MRS. LEE: Oh yes, and Miss Reese's too.

DR. PATTERSON: I see.

MRS. LEE: Almost everything happened was whites. There was always Johnson's Cleaners and Carolina Cleaners.

DR. PATTERSON: Also whites.

MRS. LEE: Yeah. There was Teako's on the corner. He was white. That was the sandwich that was on the corner. It was white or Assyrian or something. Then, of course now, we shopped at the A & P Store which is now Piggly Wiggly. Then we had Pollock's Grocery Store. He sold rotten shoes and he had a supermarket.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, he's black.

MRS. LEE: Yeah. He was black. Then we had the coal man down there on Miller Street, and Mr. Pete's store. That was a candy store across the street from the school. And Emma-Line's, Miss Emmaline is a legend. She's black. She had a little cafe where she sold the best hamburgers and the best hotdogs in the world.

DR. PATTERSON: Where was that located?

MRS. LEE: It was located right beside Mr. Pete's store at that time on West Street right across the street from the school. Then she moved to where Morgan's Funeral Home is now. When I got older, that's where she was.

DR. PATTERSON: Were there other businesses in the heart of the black community?

MRS. LEE: Over in this neighborhood was Chapman's Grocery. I remember going there when we were in school. It's right over here on Garden Street. We called it Mr. Herman Chapman. (laughter) Where I am now was a restaurant named Mr. Downing's Restaurant.

DR. PATTERSON: Right here?

MRS. LEE: No, where my restaurant is. It was Downing's Restaurant, and then it was Brag's Cafe. These were like the neighborhood businesses. There was a movie theater up on Queen Street.

All of this is right in our own community. Lightening Meat Market, we'd call it. Mr. Lightening had a meat market and then he used to turn it into a disco in the evening. We called it the swinging meat market cause we could go there to dance in the evening. Then you know

Food Land, when I was older, had Gordon's. But black businesses were very limited. There was Pollock's and there was taxi cab stands and Miss Emmaline and Mr. Rowe and Herman Chapman.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you go to movies downtown ever, the Masonic and the Athens?

MRS. LEE: Oh no.

DR. PATTERSON: You had your own theater out here.

MRS. LEE: We had a movie theater up on Queen Street.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, the name of your restaurant, the one that you have now, is called the Food Palace. How long have you had it?

MRS. LEE: I've been there ten years. Before then, it was nothing. Before, it used to be Brag's Cafe, so it was black owned then. And Downing's Cafe was always a cafe.

DR. PATTERSON: Do mostly black people go there now?

MRS. LEE: Well, everybody goes there now.

DR. PATTERSON: Whites and blacks?

MRS. LEE: Yeah. But way back then it was just a black restaurant.

DR. PATTERSON: As you grew up in this area as a youngster, what was your means of transportation besides walking?

MRS. LEE: We didn't have any.

DR. PATTERSON: You had no cars?

MRS. LEE: Nobody had a car. My uncle had a car, he lived way around the street, but I don't ever remember riding in it. Nobody had cars very much.

DR. PATTERSON: Horses and wagons?

MRS. LEE: No, I didn't come through that era. I understand they used to have horse stables and things down there where I lived. But where my store is, my father came from that side of town.

DR. PATTERSON: The trolleys? You don't remember the trolleys?

MRS. LEE: No.

DR. PATTERSON: So mostly it was walking.

MRS. LEE: Just walked.

DR. PATTERSON: When you grew up at Craven Terrace, now, the plumbing, you had indoor facilities?

MRS. LEE: Yes.

DR. PATTERSON: Were there many houses in the area out here that did not have indoor plumbing?

MRS. LEE: Oh yes. Over here in this neighborhood was very rural we thought. They had pigs and chickens and things like that over on this side of town. I had a girlfriend that lived over here and they didn't have indoor plumbing. My grandma had indoor plumbing over on Bern Street where we lived when we were little.

DR. PATTERSON: What do you remember about hurricanes in New Bern?

MRS. LEE: They're frightening. Most people who live in New Bern are afraid of storms.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you remember them?

MRS. LEE: Yeah. Oh yes. I remember that whenever a big bad storm come you had to cut out all the lights, unplug everything, and everybody sit on the chair together very quietly. (laughter) Like I told you before, the one that I remember very vaguely, I don't know



the name of it, was the time when the river rose up and Sandy drowned.

DR. PATTERSON: Tell me about your cousin drowning.

MRS. LEE: We were very young. I don't remember an awful lot about it. Sandy's mom worked for some white folks downtown, so they were living down there on those streets someplace down there.

DR. PATTERSON: They were living at the corner of New and Short Street.

MRS. LEE: Okay. They had a dog that got out they say that day, and Sandy went out to get the dog.

DR. PATTERSON: The dog fell over?

MRS. LEE: The dog pulled Sandy, yeah. It was on a porch. That's how the dog got outside the door. That's how they all got outside. The dog pulled Sandy under, and Jimmy dived in to help Sandy and somebody had to pull Jimmy out. Sandy drowned and the dog.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, the Neuse River had come all the way up New Street and the water was deep outside of the house.

MRS. LEE: Yes.

DR. PATTERSON: I think it was Stevenson Hines who lived across the street who came over and saved your other cousin, but this one child drowned.

MRS. LEE: Right. I remember that. We just couldn't visualize it. We did remember daddy coming home. My daddy would be busy down at the Frog Pond. What's now the Frog Pond, that's where my daddy would be. I don't know how he got caught down there. My daddy, if it looked like it's gonna storm, he knew he had a houseful of women

that get scared of everything. He usually tried to make it back home.

I don't remember, it must have happened over night that it was happening. All I remember is early in the morning over by Miss Hassell's house, there's a lady name Miss Hassell that had a house across the street from the project, was a boat that brought my daddy up to that point. We were upstairs looking out the window because we were trying to sweep the water out of the house as it was coming in there. So, my mama took us all upstairs and we were looking out the window early that morning cause we were frightened all night wondering where my daddy was. My daddy smoked a cigar and wore a cap, and when we saw that cap!... That's what I remember about that particular storm.

DR. PATTERSON: Has the church been an important factor in the life of the black community?

MRS. LEE: Oh yes. Oh yes. I always thought that that was a problem. In the black community we were traditionally very religious, and so we depended even during slavery time on our belief in God and the church. A spiritual kind of thing that went on. It was in the churches the pastor used to have all the influence in the community.

That's how I believe the civil rights movements were organized, out of the churches. We met in churches, and we sung spiritual songs that motivated us.

DR. PATTERSON: Is that true now?

MRS. LEE: No. Not as much.

DR. PATTERSON: What's changed?

MRS. LEE: Well, people are getting back to it. But now we've

just moved away from the church. People in our community are not as involved in churches and the churches don't take an active interest the way that they did before. I mean, before, if you were burned out or destitute or something like that, you went to church and everybody in church would share with you and that kind of thing. They don't do that anymore.

DR. PATTERSON: Do many black folks go to white churches or vice-versa?

MRS. LEE: No.

DR. PATTERSON: In the days of the civil rights movement, were there many challenges to the churches in New Bern?

MRS. LEE: You talking about white churches?

DR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MRS. LEE: I don't recall there being any that I'm aware of. In another time when I worked with teenagers here, I worked with the youth organizations here in New Bern, and some of my kids went to this church on Broad Street and they were asked to leave. This was after I'd gone away and come back home. Miss Ella goes to church, because I remember telling her about that. Then the news media got involved with that. They went to church. Joanne and another friend met a friend in school, in the integrated school, who invited them to her church which is on the corner of Broad Street. They went to church that Sunday morning, you know, kind of skeptical. They'd never been in a white church but they went to church that Sunday morning. The church girls that go to church are First Baptist, they came over and asked them

leave.

DR. PATTERSON: Asked them to leave?

MRS. LEE: Yes, they asked them to leave. So the news media got involved and made a big thing about it.

DR. PATTERSON: What year was this? About when this happen?

MRS. LEE: Maybe '69, 70.

DR. PATTERSON: I don't believe that would happen these days.

MRS. LEE: I don't think it would. I doubt if it would happen now-a-days, but it happened way back then. The kids were going to New Bern High and that's how they met one another. I ran what was called the Rap House at that time. My thing was the motivation and involvement of teenagers. I was very strong with it. I had a very strong youth organization. That's how I was known, working with kids.

We had what we called the Rap House where we talked about drugs and teenage pregnancy and stuff like that, and they came to the Rap House.

I'll never forget this pastor. He's a white pastor. All I remember is Ken. I don't remember his last name. But the news media publicized the fact that the church asked them to leave. Then we had a rap session called racism and religion. It was amazing. We had just a small place.

There were white kids and black kids. At that time, young people were starving for knowledge and guidance. I had to call the police.

I only called the police to keep the crowd monitored cause I had so many kids there. We had a panel of black and white ministers to answer the questions that young people had about racism and about religion in this home. Young people became a bit confused about religion.

You know, we always were taught about God and there being one God and the love of God. In that era when Joanne and the other kids were coming up, they were just searching and they were looking for things. They were into integrated situations and things were changing, and so it was like confusing. And the one place you can go where everything is all right is church, and when you go there and find out, okay, here we're serving a white God and there you're serving a black God kind of thing, then it got kind of confusing to the kids. I was just amazed at the number of children, black and white children, and black and white parents, who attended that rap session. I had this little room where I could seat about 80 or 90. I thought it would just be black kids. We put out little fliers, we're gonna discuss racism and religion and have a panel, and they just filled that place in the area. They couldn't get in. It was a little bit too big for me, so I didn't try that again. I said, now, next time it'll probably be in a church or something. But I didn't want it to be a problem.

DR. PATTERSON: Let me ask you about something a little bit lighter. When you grew up as a child, did you go swimming in New Bern in these rivers?

MRS. LEE: Oh no. My parents wouldn't allow us to swim in the rivers. Nobody taught us to swim, so we didn't know to swim. Each summer somebody from our neighborhood would drown and we were frightened of that.

DR. PATTERSON: Where would this drowning occur?

MRS. LEE: Down by Trent Court. I met a little boy. Miss Boone,

a lady named Miss Boone, little boy drowned one year. Miss Boone had never been married but she had about ten children. You know, you'd be hot and go try to take a dip. Then they'd have swimming lessons and things like that. Or they'd go to Pembroke. There was a hole over in Pembroke, if you could walk over there. Somebody had dug out something and there was a water hole. Three of my friends drowned there. So we were really frightened. We were brought up being afraid of this river.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you go to dances?

MRS. LEE: We went to school dances, yes. We had a place called "The Teenage Shop". We lived in this building and my aunt lived in the next building. She had two sons and a daughter. So they were like big brothers. They were mean. I didn't like them. But they didn't let me do anything. There was this Teenage Shop right on Broad Street. You could go and dance. I would sneak in there when my cousins weren't looking.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, I think we've talked about a lot of things and it's been a very good interview. You've given us insight into many, many things. It's been important and I thank you. Before we stop, are there other things that you would like to tell me that I haven't brought up?

MRS. LEE: I can't think of anything. There's nothing interesting about my life. (laughter) I can't think of anything.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, let me thank you Mrs. Lee for the Memories of New Bern program for letting us get involved with you like this.

We really do appreciate it. It's been a good interview.

MRS. LEE: Great.

DR. PATTERSON: So then I'll cut this off.

MRS. LEE: Okay.

DR. PATTERSON: I know we stopped this interview, but you're telling me a wonderful story about your father's part in the New Bern fire of 1922. We really ought to record this, so go ahead.

MRS. LEE: I was just saying that after I went to the library and saw the presentation that you guys made, I was fascinated by it myself. I'd heard my father speak of it several times. When I came home and I told my father what I had seen and about the tent city, the things I had learned, then he started telling us stories about it. His knowledge of that fire, he was talking about Dr. Bryan's house and when the fire started and where he was and what was going on, and he had saved newspaper articles of the fire all these years, and then he pulled them out and showed them to me. I was just trying to think, what did I do with those newspaper articles. I remember thinking when my dad told me that, that I should call Miss Carter and tell her, because my dad and Dr. Bryan was good friends.

DR. PATTERSON: What did your father say his role was in the fire? What did he do?

MRS. LEE: I can't remember, except he had gone someplace and he came home and was calling his mom that their house didn't burn. But they were telling that Dr. Bryan's parent's house had burned. I think it was Dr. Bryan's parents. My father said that something

had happened. Before you knew it, it had started spreading, so they all had to go out and get away from the house because they didn't know where the fire was gonna go. He was just telling us how it leaped over the cemetery and how the fire was just blazing. I was asking him questions, and we were talking about how long it took the firemen to get to the fire and put it out, and how the neighbors were trying to gouge the water on the fires to get them out, and trying to wet down the houses next to them and things like that.

END OF INTERVIEW

Until age 5 my family and I lived in a wood house at 810 Bern Street with our grandmother and her husband of a second marriage. There were only three bed rooms in this house. My grandmother, her husband and their teenage daughter lived in the middle room, my uncle who was paralyzed and his wife lived in one, me and my mother, father with five girls lived in one room. We celebrated Christmas, studied, played and had our meals in that room. My oldest sister took care of us and we did not go outside or downstairs unless my sister or parents took us. Now when I drive by that house I can't imagine how we all were able to live there but we did.