

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

MRS. ANNIE MARIA JOYNER GAVIN

INTERVIEW 1016

This is Dr. Joseph Patterson representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 1000. I am interviewing Mrs. Annie Gavin at her home at 615 Brown Drive in James City, North Carolina. The number of the interview is 1016. The date is November 3, 1992.

DR. PATTERSON: I want to tell you I'm happy to be here talking to you and I appreciate you letting me come. What I'd like to do to start the interview is to ask you if you would just tell me about your family and yourself. I'd like to know when you were born, where you were born, who your parents were, your husband, your children.

MRS. GAVIN: My name is Annie Maria Joyner Gavin. I'm named for my great-grandmother. My mother's name was Mary Frances and my daddy's name was Jenious Blake Joyner. He was born in Edgecomb County. His father came to the area known now as Cherry Point and he was a huntsman's guide there.

DR. PATTERSON: What year was this?

MRS. GAVIN: It was even before the base got there. In fact, my daddy grew up in the Cherry Point area.

DR. PATTERSON: But your father came and was a guide?

MRS. GAVIN: My grandfather was a huntsman's guide and farmer down in Cherry Point. He guided such fellows as Babe Ruth in the woods. It was the area now known as Cherry Point and the base down in there. Well, the base is exactly in the area where they lived. They migrated there from Edgecomb County and came down here to find work. My granddaddy was the daddy of 36 children.

DR. PATTERSON: Thirty-six?

MRS. GAVIN: Thirty-six. (laughter) The 36th child is still living, but all the others died. He was a farmer and huntsman's guide. My daddy left home at about 11 or 12 years old, quite young. He was afraid of going to the traps and stuff and he ran away and went to New Bern. While he lived in New Bern, he got a job at the mill. He adopted an old lady who he lived with and she looked out for him. Later on he moved over in the James City area where he met my mother. I think they were married by the time they were sixteen. I'm the oldest. I think they had five children. I was born in 1911, October 28. I knew my great-grandmother and several others who were slaves. I used to enjoy hearing them talk about how they were brought up. They talked about the good slave owners and the bad ones because they all had different types. When they freed the slaves, this was in Swansboro, this was my mother's grandmother and her name was Maria, they put them on the road ahead of them and there were Yankee soldiers riding in between like you see in the movies. The slaves hated to leave their master because he was good. My great grandmother told the experience of having seen Abraham Lincoln. He came to their plantation.

DR. PATTERSON: In Swansboro?

MRS. GAVIN: In Swansboro. He came to their plantation. He was asking the stable boy questions, how he was faring. He (Lincoln) was by himself. He was well dressed and had nice horses and stuff. He was tall. My mama's grandmother described him. He left a letter in the wall. Their master's wife was expecting a baby and he left a name

for her. All of this (story) I remember. It said if her baby was a girl, name her Safronia, and if it was a boy, name him Abraham. That was his name, but they didn't know he was the President. He traveled alone. She said then he questioned the stable boys and asked them were they being treated good and he just visited. She said "he had a beautiful team of horses, but he was tall and skinny". After he went back to Washington, that's when they started laying the plans to free the slaves.

DR. PATTERSON: This was before the war, is that right?

MRS. GAVIN: Yes. Slavery time. They put them out in the road and they walked. They let them rest and they walked. You see, he came to visit to see how things were before he signed the proclamation.

Cause he had said that when he got a chance that he could that he was going to hit it good. He didn't appreciate slaves. They brought the slaves to James City, which is the area right in there on the water.

Said purpose for putting them there was it was good water and sandy land. After they got set, they built shacks, make-shift homes for them. After they got settled they supposedly had given them this shack they were living in and that piece of land, but they didn't give it to them legally and that's why they didn't own James City. Anyway, they stayed there and after he (Abe Lincoln) went back, that's when came the War. Said they were happy and they hated to leave their master and mistress cause they were good to them. Some were not. My grandmother stayed in James City and my mother and father eventually moved on this side of James City. They had schools and churches and

they got along. But then when the war came and they freed the slaves, they were kind of very much on their own. They were close to the battle when they fought. So my mother and father eventually moved on this side of the creek where they could buy the land. When they were quite young, my daddy built this home. Part of it is still there. Back then they were making shingles and the shingles were made out of wood.

I remember some of that coming off the house when they would fix it right. I think I was one year old when they moved in their house.

For the most part, we as black people in this area fared pretty good if you're smart enough to work and make some money. My daddy was a cook and a long number of years he was a brakeman on the train and he lost his foot while he was a brakeman. Then he was a barber and a cook. So he made a pretty good living for us. He taught us how to work. My great grandmother lived to be quite old. She and her other friends used to have quilting in each other's house. I remember a lot that they talked about slavery time because they all had been slaves. But just like everything else, there's some good and some bad.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, your grandmother was buried right here in James City.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. I was twelve years old when she died.

DR. PATTERSON: Were other slaves?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah, there were other slaves buried. We have a cemetery right out here.

DR. PATTERSON: So, that's a slave cemetery that you're talking

about?

MRS. GAVIN: No, that's not the slave cemetery. This is where she was buried. The slave's cemetery is out there by the airport. They had started digging the bones up and Delmar interceded in that.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, you and your husband met in New Bern, did you?

MRS. GAVIN: In school, yes, Suttons School in Duffyfield in New Bern.

DR. PATTERSON: You were in school together and then you moved here?

MRS. GAVIN: No, he came here to school and lived in the dormitory.

DR. PATTERSON: You have how many children Mrs. Gavin?

MRS. GAVIN: Five.

DR. PATTERSON: You have, as I understand it, educated these children all the way through college.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. All five of my children have college educations.

DR. PATTERSON: How did you do that?

MRS. GAVIN: Well, there was just two of us, my mother and father's children. My sister didn't have any children. She worked at Cherry Point so she helped James. As a matter of fact, James and Pat grew up here. My husband and I were in Baltimore, Maryland. We met in school, but we met again in the city. I had gone to live with my aunt and gone to work. I did go to nursing school. We got married and

we started a family. I encouraged him to come back to N.C. He was from Duplin County. Back then, there were no high schools for blacks in the little places. They had to come wherever there was a high school. That's why my husband James was in New Bern because we had an academy. The AME Zion church had a school over in Duffyfield. Dr. William Sutton was the head of this. They had dormitory for boys and dormitory for girls. In the little towns when the black kids got old enough and had ambition enough to keep on to high school, they had to leave home. That's why they had these boarding schools. I know this one in New Bern. That's where I met my husband.

DR. PATTERSON: Did your husband stay there? Did he board there?

MRS. GAVIN: Yes, he stayed there. He graduated from that school.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you board there too?

MRS. GAVIN: No. I lived over here.

DR. PATTERSON: How did you get there?

MRS. GAVIN: Walked.

DR. PATTERSON: That's quite a walk, isn't it?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah! I walked that bridge. But a lot of us did. Some went to the Catholic school. My daddy by this time had lost his foot on the train, so he opened a cafe down near the bridge. When I was eight years old, he bought me a bicycle. I had to ride that bridge and go over town to bring meats to him from Middle Street. There used to be markets on Middle Street. Are you a New Bernian?

DR. PATTERSON: Umhuh.

MRS. GAVIN: Well, you know the markets and all were down on Middle

Street. I had to ride over there mornings and get his meats and ride back cross the bridge to bring them.

DR. PATTERSON: This is the old George Street bridge.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: And you would ride your bicycle to school too?

MRS. GAVIN: Uh huh. Then I'd ride my bicycle across town to Duffyfield. That's where the school was. I was really too little to put the bicycle in school. There used to be a girl that was heavier and she'd wait every morning to get my bicycle in for me. He got my bicycle after he had the cafe. The purpose of the bicycle was for me to run the errands to get the meats and stuff. I'd ride back over the bridge and ride back over again. At that time, there were not a lot of cars, so there wasn't a lot of danger.

DR. PATTERSON: You graduated from this school?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: That was a high school diploma?

MRS. GAVIN: Umhuh.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you and your husband get married right after that?

MRS. GAVIN: No. My husband went to North Carolina Central. We met again in Baltimore, Maryland and that's where we were married.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you have further education after high school?

MRS. GAVIN: I started nursing school, but I didn't finish.

DR. PATTERSON: Your husband got his degree.

MRS. GAVIN: Yes.



DR. PATTERSON: Was your father also college educated?

MRS. GAVIN: No. My daddy, what education he had was from elementary. At the time he was growing up, he lived in Havelock. That's where his daddy was a huntsman's guide. He was afraid to go to the traps and he'd go outside and shoot like he had been to the trap and had shot something. So, he knew his daddy would get wise to that and when he was about 11 or 12 years old, he ran away and came to New Bern and lived in Jenkins alley. You know where Jenkins alley is?

DR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MRS. GAVIN: He happened to get a room with an older lady and she treated him like he was her son. You know all those mills they had up there? He worked at the mill. When he got his pay, he carried his money home to her. His mother had died. His sisters were still there. In fact, my granddaddy had come down from Edgecomb County himself to find work, he and several other men. Then he married a Havelock girl cause his first wife had died. My father's mother had died and he married a Holland down in that area.

DR. PATTERSON: Mrs. Gavin, did some of your children not live with you and your husband some?

MRS. GAVIN: James and Patricia lived with my mother and father and sister. At this time, my husband and I were living in Baltimore, Maryland.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you remember what year you came back to James City?

MRS. GAVIN: We came back to Duplin County cause that was my husband's home (Wallace N.C.) His mother was getting old and feeble and I persuaded him that we go back where he could look out for his mother. He was the only boy living at the time. He had gone to North Carolina Central, but he didn't finish and he had hoped to. So, we went back to Duplin County and we lived with his mother. Finally, we got a break. My daddy had been in the grocery business. He always kept a store, place to eat, or something. One of his neighbors, church members, got sick. There was a man there that was Seven Day Adventist.

He was from South Carolina but he had a big business. At that time, Wallace had Front Street and Back Street. The white businesses was on Front Street they called it and the black businesses was on Back Street, like shoe shops and grocery stores. I had told him; since I was brought up in a grocery store, my daddy kept a store, I had told him, rather than work at the mill, to go and ask Mr. Hammond to give him a job. He said they were managing all right without overseer.

So, he had a place in Kenansville. He set us up in business. Well, I was right at home because I was brought up in a business. That's where we lived. James and Patricia lived with my mother and father. My daddy had two sons that died, so James Francis came to be his son.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, eventually, James lived with you, didn't he?

MRS. GAVIN: No. I eventually moved back here to Craven County. We had acquired some property in Duplin County. Part of it I still have. After James died, my mother and father wanted me to move back

here cause I still had small children.

DR. PATTERSON: So, you had the five children and when you had moved back here, you all lived together?

MRS. GAVIN: No. When I moved back here, I moved into my own house. Where I live now, was moved. I was further to the road.

DR. PATTERSON: James told me when I interviewed him that when he was a boy going to school here in James City, that all his friends used to come to his house and study with him.

MRS. GAVIN: Yes.

DR. PATTERSON: He was living with you then?

MRS. GAVIN: Well, he was there most of the time, but mother and father lived right down the street and he still lived with them.

DR. PATTERSON: I see.

MRS. GAVIN: We had radio, we had television, we had everything, bicycles and stuff. So the kids, especially on Sunday, gathered at our house after church.

DR. PATTERSON: You also had an encyclopedia and they could study with that.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. I tried to buy them everything they needed for school.

DR. PATTERSON: So they would come here in the evenings and do their lessons. Is that the way it was?

MRS. GAVIN: Yes.

DR. PATTERSON: You helped them?

MRS. GAVIN: Some of them, yeah. But they mostly studied together.

In my case, my children knew their friends were always welcome. Even now, I try to encourage these kids to try and stay in school.

DR. PATTERSON: Tell me about your five children. What has happened to them? They've all been educated in college.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. Pat was the first one. She graduated from Livingstone College. Of course now, my sister didn't have any children, so her help went to them too. James went to A&T. That's where he majored in architectural engineering. Now, he dropped out of school and went to New York and he was working with an architectural firm there. This man he worked with encouraged him to go back to school and get his degree. So he went back to A&T. He wanted to fly. He went to get his wings, and that's when he became diabetic and had to give that up. Then he came back. His first job was with the architecture firm on, what's that street name that comes straight through town?

DR. PATTERSON: Pollock Street and Hancock.

MRS. GAVIN: Pollock Street and Hancock, yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: That's Stephens-Cardelli.

MRS. GAVIN: Yes, Stephens-Cardelli. That's where he got his first job. From Stephens-Cardelli, he went to work on the base and that's where he retired from.

Dr.Patterson: Then, you had three daughters?

MRS. GAVIN: Three daughters. Patricia, she's a social worker. She worked for a while at the social services in New Bern, but she's in Pamlico County now. Gwen went to nursing school. She got married before she went to nursing school. Her husband was in service. He

was stationed at the base and they lived with me. Then Gwen went back to school in D.C. and got her degree.

DR. PATTERSON: Her degree in nursing?

MRS. GAVIN: Nursing.

DR. PATTERSON: Is that a BS degree?

MRS. GAVIN: Yes, she got a BS degree. Ruth, the little one over there, the smartest one of all, she finished A&T with honors. She met her husband there. They went to live in Washington, D.C. She had one or two jobs, but finally she got employed at that veterans hospital. Right away, she saw things that needed to be changed. She's very much concerned about people. She asked her supervisor if she solicited clothes for the patients, would they let them wear them.

They wore something like uniforms. She felt like that would make them look like criminals or something. So she said that if she got enough clothes for the women and hand them in, would they let them wear them, and they said yes. Then she set in on the building. She said the walls were dark brown and dark green and it was dreary. Their minds were already clouded. She felt like they had no light anywhere.

So she went to her supervisor and asked her couldn't they get the walls painted lighter, more cheerful. She didn't give her any answer, so she went to the one above her. She said the third one she went to said "Well, I know what I'll do. I'll write my congressman."

(laughter) She's pushy and she loves people. She said when she came to work the next morning, they were painting those walls. (laughter)

Do you know that the black people in the city that this man just died,

the congressman from North Carolina?

DR. PATTERSON: Walter Jones.

MRS. GAVIN: Walter Jones. Even people who lived in the city from North Carolina would contact him and he'd do pushy things. Then Ruth started making changes for the patients. She'd go to her supervisor and ask her. She loves people. She really loves people. She said mornings when she'd come in, they'd be so happy to see her cause she'd put her arms around them or rub their head and made them know that they were loved. They gave her a course in this computer and she had to teach the other supervisors. She's a very smart little thing. They did give her two years at Catholic University where she got her Masters in nursing psychiatry. They paid for it.

DR. PATTERSON: That's wonderful. Then there's another daughter.

MRS. GAVIN: She's the baby. The other daughter went to nursing school after she was married and had two children. She was working at a hospital and then she went back to school, University of D.C. and got her degree in nursing.

DR. PATTERSON: Then you have a son, William.

MRS. GAVIN: William finished with honors at A&T. He worked in D.C. for awhile and then he went to New Jersey where he was working for federal aviation. That's where he still works. That's where he met his wife.

DR. PATTERSON: This is pretty remarkable to have educated five children all the way through college. How did you pay for their education?

MRS. GAVIN: I carried the Sun Journal paper route and the store.

DR. PATTERSON: How many years did you carry the Sun Journal paper?

MRS. GAVIN: Thirty-two years.

DR. PATTERSON: Delivering it in New Bern?

MRS. GAVIN: No. I didn't have any deliveries in New Bern, but I went to Brice's Creek and I went all the way down to Thurman working each side.

DR. PATTERSON: You had a car then?

MRS. GAVIN: I had a car.

DR. PATTERSON: When did your husband die?

MRS. GAVIN: My husband died in Duplin County.

DR. PATTERSON: Before you came back to New Bern.

MRS. GAVIN: Before I came back.

DR. PATTERSON: So you were alone all these years.

MRS. GAVIN: No, I married again. I married again, but I didn't have any children by him. He didn't work out, so I threw him out.  
(laughter)

DR. PATTERSON: But your first husband was named Gavin?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: So you kept that name.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah, I kept it.

DR. PATTERSON: But you've been alone many years now.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. I divorced Richard. He was a Williams. I accepted his name while I was married to him and then when I divorced him, I went back to Gavin.

Dr. Patterson; During the years you were delivering the Sun Journal, you were also running the store? The store right here in your home, the one you have now?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah, the one I have now. Only, I was running a store then because I sold more.

DR. PATTERSON: But the store is still opened now.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. I'm not doing that much cause there's a Food Lion right down the road, which I'm glad because it's convenient to people. I carried the paper route for thirty-two years. I'd close around noon and pick my papers up. I'd close the place up cause by this time the kids were all out on their own. Then when I'd come back in the afternoon, I'd open up again. By living right here, I could stay open sometimes late at night.

DR. PATTERSON: This enabled you to educate these five children?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, you were in the Sun Journal then for about what years?

MRS. GAVIN: I've been retired from the Sun Journal for 5, 6, 7 years.

DR. PATTERSON: You delivered the papers up until six years ago?

MRS. GAVIN: Uh huh.

DR. PATTERSON: And you are eighty-five now.

MRS. GAVIN: Eighty-one. I will be 82 on Oct. 28.

DR. PATTERSON: So until age seventy-five, you were delivering papers.



MRS. GAVIN: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: You knew Mr. J. B. Dawson.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: Tell me about Mr. Dawson. What was he like?

MRS. GAVIN: He was the head of Sun Journal at the time, right?

DR. PATTERSON: Right. He was the owner.

MRS. GAVIN: He was a kind person. He seemed to be very kind.

I didn't see much of him. Mr. Midyette is the person that I got to know more.

DR. PATTERSON: Mr. Charles Midyette.

MRS. GAVIN: Mr. Charles Midyette.

DR. PATTERSON: What was he like?

MRS. GAVIN: Just as nice as he could be I thought. I felt so sorry for him when that new company came in and put him off. I used to meet him on the street. He had been there so long under Mr. Diggs. I think that worried him enough that he would be so depressed. I used to see him downtown. I thought it wasn't fair all them years he had been there. Trudy's still there. She was his secretary.

DR. PATTERSON: Mr. Midyette was managing editor or something like that?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah, he was managing editor.

DR. PATTERSON: When you came back to this area, to James City, what was James City like?

MRS. GAVIN: James City was about like it is now except that there was more people because a lot of the younger people have left and gone

to the cities or gone to other places to live. I think we got four, five churches I believe. James City people as a whole are about like they were originally because they always stayed together good and looked out for each other.

DR. PATTERSON: What was New Bern like in those days when you were growing up?

MRS. GAVIN: I remember the fire in 1922. I had my eleventh birthday. I didn't go over where the fire was, but where we were out on the road, there's a stone building out there. That was my daddy's place. It wasn't always stone, but he put stone building up after the other place got burned down. It's still out there. From where we were we could see the fire leaping. Just leaping over the houses.

We concluded it must have been burning out some of that sin, cause part of where that was burned used to be kind of rough. There was mostly blacks. It burnt the church too though, St. Peter's church.

From where I was standing even out in the road looking, you could see like balls of fire leaping.

DR. PATTERSON: Did any of the people who lost their homes come over to James City after that until they could build again?

MRS. GAVIN: Yes, some of them. Some of them were from over here too.

DR. PATTERSON: What other memories do you have about New Bern?

MRS. GAVIN: I found in my growing up that white and black people got along good together. For instance, there was this old lady that lived over here. She had worked in that family from the time this

judge was born and for his mother. I don't remember the judge's name.

After she got so she couldn't work, she sold whiskey and the law got her and carried her to court. He looked at her and he said, "Didn't you use to work for my mother?" She said, "Yeah. I was working there when you were a baby." At that time, way back, the people didn't know as much about sterilizing bottles, the milk bottles and stuff, so a lot of whites have nursed black's breast. He told the court, "I couldn't sentence her cause she nursed me from her breast." Cause she was there when he was born and she had children too. He told her, "Now, don't go selling whiskey again. You come and get in contact with me every week and I'll give you some money to buy food." He looked out for her until she died. The beautiful part about all of that and if you look at it from the way I look, white people and colored people always got along where there was an understanding. If you let your mind go back, all the trouble mostly started with rabble rousers. But for the most part, and I've seen this here where I grew up, the white people and colored people got along fine together. Of course, there's some mean in everything. There's some people that wasn't smart enough to work, so they got in trouble.

DR. PATTERSON: You think that the black people who worked for white families loved the white folks and the white folks loved them?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah, they loved them.

DR. PATTERSON: That's the way I remember it when I grew up. You lived through a lot of troubled times in this regard. Do you remember when the civil rights acts came up in the sixties and Martin

Luther King's assassination?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: Was there trouble in this area then?

MRS. GAVIN: I don't think there was too much trouble in this area. But like I say, cause I know about this area, white people and colored people always got along. Even if they did it without wanting other white people knowing it, there were white people that looked out for us, that were really friends.

DR. PATTERSON: Does that feeling still exist?

MRS. GAVIN: I don't think there's too much bitterness between the whites and blacks in our area. Do you?

DR. PATTERSON: Are you talking about James City or New Bern?

MRS. GAVIN: I mean the whole area.

DR. PATTERSON: It doesn't seem to me that it's so bad. Do you think that the integration of schools has worked?

MRS. GAVIN: Yes, I think it has.

DR. PATTERSON: Has it been good?

MRS. GAVIN: I think Ruth went to integrated school. But my children mostly went to high school while it was still segregated. Do you know there have been and was way back even when there was a complete segregation, the white kids and black kids played together even if they had to keep it secret.

DR. PATTERSON: In James City?

MRS. GAVIN: In James City.

DR. PATTERSON: In New Bern?

MRS. GAVIN: And in New Bern. They were friends even though they couldn't be. And there were white people that looked out for black people and they were friends to them. One thing my mother said, her grandmother, say, you couldn't tell her on from being from white, she was from Norfolk. She had real long black hair. Her husband was from the Everglades. Ruth Ann did all that research. My mother's grandmother was from Norfolk. You couldn't tell her from white. Her husband was from the Florida Everglades and he was bald head and Indian type.

DR. PATTERSON: I hear a lot about separate but equal for blacks and whites. Some blacks really would prefer it that way and some whites would too. How do you look at that?

MRS. GAVIN: I think people that can get along should be able to be together, if they can get along. If it's gonna cause friction, then they shouldn't. There's not too much separate anymore anywhere.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you think the future is pretty good for all of this?

MRS. GAVIN: Yes, I think so. I think as people are being educated; like say the school for instance, there's a lot of black kids that the white kids were friends with. He said he had a friend and they lived in the country and they didn't have school buses. The whites had school buses, said, but this white friend of his always sat on the back end of the bus. They didn't have bus, maybe, must have had carts. I don't know what. But they rode. Whites ones did. Said he always picked him up, pulled him on the back and he rode to school

and they let him off.

DR. PATTERSON: This is certainly interesting and it's nice to hear you say these favorable things about the future.

MRS. GAVIN: Here is the way I always look at life. I find in doing so, you look at the bright side. Because I know and you know, the mean black people and the mean white people. But those people that have love in their heart and they are Christians, if they have to hide it, they'll be good to you. There is a white man that was on my paper route. He's from Mississippi, Ed Scales. He's the nicest person that you want to know. He used to be over the shipyard. I have helped a lot of fellows sign up to work there. There's one fellow who we called Smokey and he used to work with Mr. Scales. Mr. Scales was a contractor too.

DR. PATTERSON: Smokey Ferebee?

MRS. GAVIN: No, his name is William Foy. He died just recently. Mr. Scales would go to see him and carry him food. Mr. Scales was just a nice person. He's from Mississippi. His mama was kind of pecky so they say. But he is a nice person.

DR. PATTERSON: Let me look at something else with you Mrs. Gavin. You lived through World War II. You were here.

MRS. GAVIN: Uh huh.

DR. PATTERSON: How did World War II affect the black communities in James City and in New Bern?

MRS. GAVIN: I think I was about five years old at the end of World War I. I remember something about World War I. My uncles went

to war.

DR. PATTERSON: In World War I?

MRS. GAVIN: In World War I. Armistice day must have been near my birthday. My uncles were coming back home. The strangest thing about people. There were white people that preferred black people's companionship, for to be friends. White fellows would come to visit. My daddy had a lot of white friends. If they could do anything to help you, they did it. Even according to my grandmother and the women that I used to listen to. The white kids would try to play with the black kids and hide. They liked them as friends and they taught them everything they knew. Then I knew another old lady. Her father was white and he had a family by her mother, but her mother didn't have to work. She was a slave, but she didn't have to work. If you watched Roots, you notice this wife looking right at her husband going to Tizzie's house. That's the way it was. He fathered children by these women and his children didn't have to work. Cause Miss Hannah said that she played in the big house cause that was her father. Those white women had something to take too, didn't they? That wasn't fair. But wasn't anything they could do about it.

DR. PATTERSON: Getting back to World War I. Your uncles went to war. Were there a lot of black people who served in the military in World War I?

MRS. GAVIN: Yes. Some of them were anxious to go because there was a change in their status.

DR. PATTERSON: We're talking about World War I?

MRS. GAVIN: World War I. Yeah, I know about World War I.

DR. PATTERSON: Mrs. Gavin, let's talk about World War II.

MRS. GAVIN: I had a son-in-law in World War II. My daughter's husband. This was the last war, wasn't it?

DR. PATTERSON: That's right.

MRS. GAVIN: They were staying with me. He was at the base went he met her. That was Gwen. After they were married, they went to Washington, D.C.

DR. PATTERSON: Were there a lot of black people then who joined the services?

MRS. GAVIN: A lot of them went into service for a step up in their livelihood.

DR. PATTERSON: They were glad to do this, were they?

MRS. GAVIN: Yes, glad to do it.

DR. PATTERSON: A lot of young people from James City and New Bern?

MRS. GAVIN: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: Did many black people leave New Bern during that time looking for jobs up north?

MRS. GAVIN: Before then, as I remember, a lot of people was leaving this area going to the shipyard in Norfolk. They would go to the shipyard during that war and get jobs. They'd work all the week and sometimes they'd come home once a month.

DR. PATTERSON: Did they stay up there after the war was over?

MRS. GAVIN: Some of them stayed and some of them came back.



DR. PATTERSON: When the young men who left in the service and went away to war, when they came home, did they find things to their liking or did they find that conditions were not what they hoped for?

MRS. GAVIN: Well, I guess they were used to whatever they found, so I guess it didn't bother them too much. I didn't hear too much complaining.

DR. PATTERSON: So they just came back to their lives and kept right on with things.

MRS. GAVIN: Umhuh. They had more or less elevated themselves because they were able to get a check. Some of them.

DR. PATTERSON: They saw new things and learned new things.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. They associated with different people.

DR. PATTERSON: They were better people when they came back.

MRS. GAVIN: Better people when they came back.

DR. PATTERSON: Let me ask you about the schools in James City and in New Bern as you remember them. Before integration, what was the school atmosphere like? What were the schools like?

MRS. GAVIN: Well, of course you know they were separated. The first school I went to, not as to go to school, I came up with my uncles and boys and girls that were older than I was, it was a Catholic school.

DR. PATTERSON: In New Bern?

MRS. GAVIN: In New Bern.

DR. PATTERSON: Where was that located? Middle Street?

MRS. GAVIN: No. The street went straight down. Do you know Trudy at the Sun Journal?

DR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MRS. GAVIN: She used to live around there. Where her house was, that's where the school was.

DR. PATTERSON: It might have been Pollock Street. I'm not sure. That's where you went to school?

MRS. GAVIN: I wasn't in school because I wasn't old enough, but I went with larger children. My uncle went and mama would let me go. I could do about like I wanted to cause I was little. They had swings. That was my first experience.

DR. PATTERSON: Was this just a black school?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah, it was black.

DR. PATTERSON: So it was a black Catholic school?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. It had white and black teachers. Mrs. O'Hara was one.

DR. PATTERSON: You went to school though at the...

MRS. GAVIN: Over in Duffyfield.

DR. PATTERSON: What was that school like? I've heard about that school.

MRS. GAVIN: It was the Sutton School and it belonged to the AME Zion Church. Dr. William Sutton was the organizer. It was primarily supported by the AME Zion Church. Livingstone College is where my daughter went and it is a Methodist school. It's in Salisbury.

DR. PATTERSON: Well now, this high school that you went to, was that the only high school for blacks in New Bern at that time?

MRS. GAVIN: West Street.

DR. PATTERSON: You had your choice of going to West Street or to this other school.

MRS. GAVIN: Right.

DR. PATTERSON: Then in James City, the elementary school is where the children went to school.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: As you look back, do you think the schooling that you got and they got was adequate?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah, I think they gave us good schooling. Actually, the teachers make the school. The thing that has happened and I think that has affected young people, they took the prayer out of schools. When I went to school, you had Bible verses and you had prayer before going to classes. Wasn't that the way it was when you went?

DR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MRS. GAVIN: A lot of kids grow up now a days are not taught to pray. Now, we were taught to pray. We had to say our prayers. Two things we had to do; we had to take a wash off. In the summertime you went barefooted, so before you got in the bed, you had to wash and my mother used to make us kneel and say our prayers. Our Father Prayer, we had to learn it. We had to say it every night. I don't care how sleepy we were, we had to say it. In school you had to listen and pray and all of that. Even some of the teachers in their classroom, they had Bible verses and stuff. But they don't allow them to do that anymore.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you think it's made a difference?

MRS. GAVIN: Yes, it made a difference cause some of these boys and girls haven't had anybody to teach them to pray. When I was a little girl, I had to go to church. Some kids don't have to go to church cause the parents didn't and so they don't teach them to go. I think when they took that prayer out of schools, it was bad for whites and blacks.

DR. PATTERSON: Have the churches in James City played an important role in the black people's lives?

MRS. GAVIN: They did at one time, but now there's so much dissension in the churches. Not like it used to be. Just last week or week before last, a young man joined the church. He married a girl in the church and he called himself a preacher and they wanted him as the preacher and they locked the preacher out. But you see, they can't do that and I think they're going to court.

DR. PATTERSON: People still go to church.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah, people still go to church. This is a recent thing that happened last week or week before.

DR. PATTERSON: When you were younger and growing up, what was South Front Street in New Bern like? Was it busy?

MRS. GAVIN: South Front Street in New Bern, that's - you go in town and go up.

DR. PATTERSON: Yeah. That's where the wharves and the piers used to be and the boats would come in.

MRS. GAVIN: Well, back then, they had a lot of whiskey joints and things. Part of it was considered kind of rough.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, is this on the riverfront?

MRS. GAVIN: Yes. South Front Street that goes go up to the bypass now. Part of Craven Terrace is in there.

DR. PATTERSON: That's right. Do you remember the Meadow's shipyard?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: I was just wondering if that was a very busy place down in that area.

MRS. GAVIN: It was busy then.

DR. PATTERSON: There's another topic that's important to ask you about and that's about medical care. When you were growing up and your children, what sort of medical care did you have?

MRS. GAVIN: The Catholics had the hospital. What's the name of that street that used to come straight up from the bridge?

DR. PATTERSON: George Street?

MRS. GAVIN: George Street. You notice the Catholic hospital.

DR. PATTERSON: My father built that hospital. That used to be St. Luke's.

MRS. GAVIN: St. Luke's, yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: Before St. Luke's though, before Good Shepherd, what did black folks do about hospital care?

MRS. GAVIN: There was a hospital around on the street near the water. You remember that hospital? The last owner of that hospital was a good person. I think back then, I can't remember the name of the hospital, but you know there was another hospital the same time

as St. Luke's.

DR. PATTERSON: New Bern General?

MRS. GAVIN: New Bern General. That last head doctor there died. There was a colored doctor in town that was with him.

DR. PATTERSON: Who ran the hospital?

MRS. GAVIN: The white doctor ran the hospital and I think he died in the hospital.

DR. PATTERSON: The black people used to go to the New Bern General Hospital and they were taken care of?

MRS. GAVIN: Yes. And St. Luke's too, in the basement.

DR. PATTERSON: Did they get good medical care?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah, they got good medical care. A lot of the people that went to the hospitals, most all the women that worked, they worked in somebody's kitchen and wherever they worked with whoever they worked, they saw to it.

DR. PATTERSON: What about care in James City? Did you have doctors who would come to your house and take care of you?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah, Dr. Mann. Black doctors. And white doctors too at one time.

DR. PATTERSON: They would come into your homes here and treat you?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: Did folks have any kind of medical insurance in those days?

MRS. GAVIN: No, I don't think so.

DR. PATTERSON: How did you pay for this service?

MRS. GAVIN: I guess we paid on time. I don't know.

DR. PATTERSON: But as far as you remember, the medical care for black people was fairly decent.

MRS. GAVIN: Yes. But you know, believe it or not, so far as relationship, I know about my area, there's always somebody, some white person, even if they didn't want it known, they did special things for black people. It's like I said about this incidence about this woman and she was selling whiskey and the law got her and carried her to court and the judge say I couldn't arrest her cause I'd arrest my mama and he told her don't sell anymore whiskey and every week you send somebody and I'll send you money for food so you won't have to do it.

DR. PATTERSON: Back in the early days, how did people get around? You told me you used to walk across the bridge and you used to ride your bicycle across the bridge. Did most folks over here have to walk to New Bern when they went to town?

MRS. GAVIN: During that time, Sam Dunston had this thing on top with horses. He ran a taxi with horses.

DR. PATTERSON: From James City?

MRS. GAVIN: Umhuh.

DR. PATTERSON: Taking people to New Bern?

MRS. GAVIN: Uh huh. Taking them and bringing them.

DR. PATTERSON: Were there any ferries to New Bern then?

MRS. GAVIN: I don't remember when they used it, but when I was

a little girl there was a flat down at the end near the water and my mama said that that's how they got to town cause there wasn't a bridge.

DR. PATTERSON: That was before the bridge was built.

MRS. GAVIN: Before the bridge was built.

DR. PATTERSON: And they'd go on this flat boat across to New Bern.

MRS. GAVIN: Right. You know the things like they'd haul logs and stuff and you had this thing you could paddle yourself. You see it in the movies now and sometimes on TV. They would have to take that thing and row over and leave it at Wick's over there on that end.

There was a store named Wick's. That's where they did the shopping.

I remember when it was there. Then the next people that wanted to use it, bring it right back across over there. Cause there was no bridge.

There was a railroad bridge first. A lot of people would walk the railroad bridge, but it was kind of dangerous. You never knew when the train was coming.

DR. PATTERSON: Were there many cars then after the bridge was built?

MRS. GAVIN: After the bridge was built, yes, a lot of people had cars. Cause my daddy when he got his foot cut off as I say, they paid him money and he had a car. Then those people that had cars, would bring people back and forth.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you remember electric cars?

MRS. GAVIN: No, I don't remember electric cars.

DR. PATTERSON: (laughter) My mother had an electric car. I



remember that. You spoke of the mills, people working in the mills, a little bit earlier. What mills were they and where were they located?

MRS. GAVIN: They were located, remember Mamie Sadler?

DR. PATTERSON: Miss Sadler's store.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. Up in that way.

DR. PATTERSON: That was on National Avenue.

MRS. GAVIN: National Avenue, yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: Were these lumber mills?

MRS. GAVIN: Lumber mills, planing mills.

DR. PATTERSON: Did a lot of black people work up there?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. And they walked from James City to over there.

DR. PATTERSON: Took them quite a while.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. They'd start early. They had the bridge to cross. Some of those mills still operate, don't they?

DR. PATTERSON: Yes. When the new bridge was built across the Trent River, that made it a little bit better.

MRS. GAVIN: That made it a lot better.

DR. PATTERSON: What other type work did black people do in those days? You worked for white people?

MRS. GAVIN: Worked in white people's house and took in washing.

DR. PATTERSON: They'd bring the washing home?

Mrs. Gavin; Yeah, they'd bring the washing home. Miss May Lizzie and Miss Ida that live right straight down this street, they would go Monday mornings, the children had to make the fire and heat the

water in a big pot outside, a big old round iron pot. They'd go to various places that they washed for. They could tell everybody's clothes separately cause they would have a whole lot of washing. The boys had to build the fire around the pot outdoors and then have the water boiling hot, ready for them when they get back with the clothes. They could tell everybody's clothes. They washed the clothes and dried them the first day and sometimes they'd iron all night. Cause they were neighbors to us, I could hear the irons hitting the ironing board. They would iron all night and sometimes take the clothes back the next day.

DR. PATTERSON: Then they'd work in kitchens?

MRS. GAVIN: Some of them went to work everyday in the kitchen, get the children, and cook and clean house. Cause at that time, some of the white mothers were still working.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you remember some of the black women would go down the streets in town selling vegetables and fish?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. "Selling nice fresh peas!"

DR. PATTERSON: Butter beans.

MRS. GAVIN: "Butter beans." I'd wanta do it and I ask my daddy to let me go to selling. I thought that was a great excitement. Corn and stuff. Papa always had a great stuff too. He let me go one time and I didn't ask to go no more. (laughter)

DR. PATTERSON: Do you remember the baptisms in the river?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you ever get involved in that?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. They had baptisms over here, but they don't even use that beach anymore.

DR. PATTERSON: Were you baptized there?

MRS. GAVIN: No. We have church baptisms some in our church.

DR. PATTERSON: There used to be a lot of baptisms down on East Front Street.

MRS. GAVIN: Yes, they did.

DR. PATTERSON: You remember those?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: They used to come right by my door going to the river. What do you remember about the Depression?

MRS. GAVIN: During the Depression, I was quite young. We always had plenty of food, so I wouldn't know. My daddy, even though he had lost his foot by then, he always made a good living. He at one time owned out here where the airport is. Laughinghouse finally bought it from him.

DR. PATTERSON: So the Depression didn't bother you a great deal?

MRS. GAVIN: No because my daddy was I guess used to working. He always had a garden and always had a little place to make us go and pull corn.

DR. PATTERSON: Were other black people around here as fortunate as you all were?

MRS. GAVIN: Well, some of them worked to the mills. But you know, I think it depends on the person's get up. Now some people wouldn't work. So if you don't work, you can't expect anything. Some

of the old men depend on the women to go to work for them. But my daddy even after he lost his foot, he'd still cut hair and had a place.

DR. PATTERSON: You don't remember then that the Depression had any great affect on the blacks in James City?

MRS. GAVIN: No. They all seemed to manage to get something to eat.

DR. PATTERSON: If you don't have a lot to begin with...

MRS. GAVIN: That's right. If you don't have a lot to begin with, you can't miss what you haven't had.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you remember the streets in New Bern before they were paved?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: What were they like?

MRS. GAVIN: Dusty. (laughter)

DR. PATTERSON: Were they brick?

MRS. GAVIN: Some of them were. The main ones were.

DR. PATTERSON: But others were just dirt roads.

MRS. GAVIN: Umhuh.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you remember Broad Street before the bridge came in?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: How do you remember that street? Was it pretty?

MRS. GAVIN: Dusty until they paved it. They first put brick I think and then later became concrete.

Dr. Patterson; How do you remember hurricanes?

MRS. GAVIN: Hurricanes were kind of devastating. In some cases they took away people's furniture and the houses and boats and stuff.

DR. PATTERSON: Was it pretty hard on James City?

MRS. GAVIN: No, it wasn't too bad on James City. It did take away a storage house and flour house my mama had down the creek.

DR. PATTERSON: Water was blown towards New Bern most of the time.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. The last one, I was down on the corner, down in there from where Adolph Paul comes in. The water came up to my steps. My place at the time was built kind of on a hill. My daddy made a point to have them to put it up high. My mother and father lived down in that street and they had to bring them out to my house cause the water did go in their house, but it didn't go in mine.

DR. PATTERSON: When you were a girl, what things did you do for fun?

MRS. GAVIN: When I was a girl, for the most part I kept store for my daddy after school. On Sunday, we went to church. My daddy was kind of a good disciplinarian. I didn't get to hang in the street.

My children went to the beach and up the Ransone and all. But most times, sat on the porch. Earlier than that when I was little, my great-grandmother was still living. We were living over here but we'd go over to James City. That was when they had a camp. The soldiers were down, not quite to Cherry Point, but they had a camp down there.

DR. PATTERSON: Camp Patterson:

MRS. GAVIN: Camp Patterson.

DR. PATTERSON: Named for my father.

MRS. GAVIN: The train would bring those soldiers back and forth. Sometimes they'd be moving them on Sunday evenings and the women with their little children would go to that post office. There was a bench there and the women sat out on the bench after church. Just about everybody was going to church then. They would watch the fellows come by on the train and they'd be waving. That was recreational. (laughter)

DR. PATTERSON: That was the CCC Camp.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you as a girl go swimming?

MRS. GAVIN: No, I never did learn to swim. I never wanted to swim.

DR. PATTERSON: As you grew up, did you go to dances?

MRS. GAVIN: No, not unless it was connected with school. Even my graduation party, my mother went. My daddy was a strict disciplinarian.

DR. PATTERSON: What did your children do for fun?

MRS. GAVIN: I was some of the first people to have a TV. I always had a radio and records and all the kids just about came to my house after church on Sunday. Even kids came from New Bern cause I let my kids play records and stuff. I had a bicycle. My daddy always saw to that. I had a bicycle and a lot of the kids learned to ride bicycles. A lot of them were less fortunate than we were. But as a whole, James City people got along real good together.

DR. PATTERSON: Did your children go swimming in the Neuse River?

MRS. GAVIN: No. I didn't never let them go swimming. If so,

they slipped. I know the girls didn't.

DR. PATTERSON: James mentioned a place over in James City where they had dances.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. That was Ransone Charles' beach and they had dances. Ransone Robinson. He's still living. He carried the Sun Journal paper too for years and years and years til he couldn't carry them. But they had a beach right down on the river. Buses used to come from other places there to swim.

DR. PATTERSON: Let me ask you this question here. Have you had a happy life?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah, I had a happy life. My daddy was rather strict, which I thank him for. But I always had plenty food, and all the things that would make us happy, he bought it. I had an organ and a gramophone. They were gramophones then. He was a good provider. After he lost his foot, he was home. He did everything he could for his family. I've never known what it was to go hungry.

DR. PATTERSON: And you've been happy about your children.

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah, I'm happy about my children. I tried to give them the same life my daddy gave me. Only, I gave them more freedom than I had. I let them go to the beach on Sunday after church down on the water. A lot of we mothers went too to the beach and watched the children play on the edge of the water.

DR. PATTERSON: How are the grandchildren turning out?

MRS. GAVIN: Gwen's daughter and her son, her baby boy, graduated from Howard. Ruth, the one they say so smart, her son is a senior

at Howard this year. He has been very fortunate. He's in engineering and he belongs to the engineering club and every summer they send him on a job. The first summer, he went to Detroit. This past summer, he went to Chicago with all expenses paid. And he earned money too. He's smart like his mama.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, I have asked you the questions I really wanted to ask you. It's been a great conversation. Are there things that you would like to speak to that we haven't talked about?

MRS. GAVIN: Well, there is good relationships between whites and blacks. Really, I think good relationship. Of course, the schools weren't integrated when my children came up, but now it is. I guess they have PTA and all that stuff. But for the most part, we haven't had too many complaints. I mean the relationship between whites and blacks are not the same thing it was before integration.

DR. PATTERSON: Are you saying it's better or it's worse now?

MRS. GAVIN: I think it's better from what I know. Because they understand each other. I guess for the most part, before integration, black kids were taught you don't play with white kids and maybe they were taught the same thing. But now, it's nothing to see whites and blacks associating together.

DR. PATTERSON: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

MRS. GAVIN: I can say for New Bern and my experience, we haven't had a lot of problems. I don't think. I don't think the white people and black people have had a lot of problems. Course now, there's both good and bad in both races. That stealing and breaking in now, we



didn't have a whole lot of that. But now there's some of these people breaking in people's things and all this on account of drugs, which is bad.

DR. PATTERSON: I think this has been a good interview. You have told me and our group a lot of things that are very important. This will be an important part of our story and I want to thank you Mrs. Gavin for letting this Memories program come to you and talk to you.

MRS. GAVIN: I found in my association on the paper route, I got to know a lot of people and they got to know me by association and they would tell me their problems. Like for instance, this particular family, they were a beautiful family, Elsie, her daddy used to run an upholstery shop downtown. The first street you get to going up is not Middle. What is the name of that?

DR. PATTERSON: Craven? East Front?

MRS. GAVIN: Craven. It's where the coca-cola house used to be.

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

MRS. GAVIN: Middle, I guess so. But her daddy used to run an upholstery place there. Later they moved down the road and I got to know Amy real well. Amy had a daughter she was having a lot of problems with and she was going to leave the whole thing, the husband and her daughter too. Her husband was an electrician. He was from up north.

She said she had her bag packed and she was going to leave the whole mess. I said, "What you think that's gonna solve?" I said, "That's your family. You're supposed to stick it out." I said, "Maybe you're not praying enough." (laughter) So, she finally got it. But I think

her daughter ended up marrying a black fella and moved away. They didn't get along too good with the neighbors and they moved out in the country and he died. He was from up north originally. But I found out that I must have made somebody feel good to tell your troubles to cause a lot of them would tell me things about the children, like Elsie. Her daughter was having problems. I think from the beginning she liked black boys. I told her, "You take it to God. You can't stop her from doing whatever she wants to do." And she ended up marrying a black man.

DR. PATTERSON: She was white?

MRS. GAVIN: Yeah. Her mama and daddy at that time was real old. They used to run a mission home back there on the water. But they would ask my opinion, so I gave them my honest opinion. Sometimes it's better to put your arm around a person that's being a problem and let them know you're a friend. Her daughter was sort of loose and so I told her, "Your leaving won't solve anything. It'll make it worse."

DR. PATTERSON: Well, I'm gonna cut this off now Mrs. Gavin and we'll close this interview. As I say, it's been really a great time for me.

END OF INTERVIEW