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Gullah Project  
Phillip and Vernetia Patterson  
Unknown(s)  
July 23, 2012  
Penn Center, St. Helena Island, South Carolina

VP: Start? Um, yes I'm 43 years old.

PP: And I will be turning 42 years old in a few weeks. And my wife and I, we met in 1992. (VP nods). Yup, 1992. Got married December of 1994. December 31st, New Years Eve, easy date for a brother to remember. And that's how we met. We became members of New Life Deliverance Temple. I met my wife. She was a member of New Life Deliverance Temple here on St. Helena's Island. And transitions of how the church went from where it was then to what it is now. Transition has been rather intense. Rather intense transition as far as the worship because you went from the old, traditional testimonial songs, testimonies to now, the 21st century worship which is intense, where it draws people into the presence of the Lord. And not that it didn't do that back then, but I believe in the traditional aspect. They dealt more with hymnals, which we still use at our church so that our young people don't lose the concept of how our forefathers came up, the different songs that they sang and how the songs actually helped them transition through life. So... so we still use that, even in our 21st century of church.

Unknown (offscreen): What plantation or area is that, your church located on?

PP: Our church is located not far from the Penn Center. So we're less than two miles from Penn Center. So the land was given to the church by one of the members that is actually a member now, which is our church administrator. His wife, the family actually gave that land to the church, so that was a blessing. Which is not far from Penn Center.

Unknown 2 (offscreen): So with the transition of the church, are you maintaining older people? Cause I know you bringing in younger people. And tryna do both sometimes can be hard.

PP: Right. (Nods).

Unknown 2 (offscreen): So is it hard to ensure you have equal for both groups?

PP: Yes, and what helps us with that is the type of pastor we have. Our pastor is 52 years old. So we still keep that concept of you're bringing in the new, but you really don't want to forget your patriots and patriots that actually got you here. And our church, being a young church in the 21st century, we have not many elderly. But our thing is, we never forget our elderly. Why? Because off of their backs, we're actually standin where we are now. So we never gonna forget that.

Unknown 2 (offscreen): So how old is your church?

PP: New Life Deliverance Temple is 24 years old. 24 years old.

Unknown 2 (offscreen): That's a baby church in this part! (Chuckles).

PP: Yes, in this community. I mean, you have a lot of older churches. You have Brick Baptist, which is not far from Penn Center. You also have Bethesda, which is a little older.

VP: Ebenezer.

PP: Ebenezer Baptist Church. And the list goes on and on so, we count it as a blessing as a church that we been there for 24 years. That we have blended in with the older churches and yet still, the fellowship is good because we don't lose that relationship of still being in contact with the older generation as well as the new generation, being blended.

Unknown (offscreen): Could you tell us a little bit about your past and your history? As far as where you're from, when did you come to the island, to this area?

PP: When did I come to this area? My family... my dad was in the military. 23 and a half years, he was a drill instructor on Parris Island. And my life has been transitioning from state to state, city to city, so every four years, of course, you movin from base to base. But my mom grew up in a small town, maybe thirty miles from Beaufort. Small town called Yemassee, South Carolina. And her family was from there, so she wanted to move our family back to that area when my father retired. And I finally moved back here in 1984. (Nods). 1984. So transitioning stage was good. You kinda get used to your city, suburban life and then you come back to slower pace. So that's kinda hard to get used to. My wife, being partially raised in Washington D.C., so you go from street lights to no lights. (Chuckles).

Unknown (offscreen): Could you tell us a little about growing up there?

VP: Well, I was born here and I went to school here, from elementary and then my parents, they moved. And we moved to Suitland, Maryland. And we stayed there until my parents ended up divorcing. And then my mother came back when I was sixteen and I grew up here and I went to Beaufort High. And basically that's it. I mean, I did grow up here. When I was younger, I... like I was telling my husband earlier, about how it's changed the. I've seen how the place have developed. It used to be like very few stores. I remember when it wasn't a Wal-Mart and I was telling my children. I said, "We got a Wal-Mart!" And they're looking like, when we brought 'em back, we actually got a Wal-Mart. No mall. So, it's still a small town, but I enjoy the area cause it's not too fast. It's still have the quietness about it, you know, and everything so. I just, I like it here.

Unknown (offscreen): Could you tell us about some of your experiences at Beaufort High School?

VP: At Beaufort High, well, at the time when I was goin there, I came in the tenth grade. So, it was a mix. At the time, it was a mix, you know, we had fairly good quarm of people. You had your Black, you had your White. But they still had a little bit of discourse even though all the racial stuff was pretty much was gone, but you still had that clique thing where you stayed with the Whites and the Whites stayed with the Blacks. And it wasn't that much of a mix. I guess in Southern type of thing where that happens. But, it was a pretty good school. I didn't know. I wasn't too social. I did a couple things, like maybe played volleyball. But, I wasn't that much of an outgoing person. So, but I enjoyed my school year.

Unknown (offscreen): Did your classmates identify with people that stayed on the island as opposed to people that lived in the city?

VP: Yeah I think so. Cause I mean, we had people from the island that went to the school, too. But in this area, they had a little rivalry goin on. With the island people and then the people that lived in town. And so they would have their, not gangs, but their little discourse about them because, "You from the island." That kinda thing. And sometime there would be like fights or something like that. Then I remember like with dating, they'd be like, "You datin a island boy." Or whatever, which it's not that far away. But they made it appear that you s'posed to stay with your people and the island people s'posed to stay with the island. For some reason, I don't know why. But it was strange to me cause I'm lookin like... I was born here and then by me leaving and the coming back to that kind of atmosphere, you're looking like "What difference does it make?" You know, it's still people is people. (Chuckles). But they did do that.

Unknown 2 (offscreen): So how could they tell who was an islander?

VP: You just knew. Like the families, they knew the families. Like some island people might be Chisolm's or somethin. Or Singleton's. And you knew that last name so you said, "Oh he's from the island." Or something like that. So you know you not supposed to be talkin to that person or somethin like that. So it's kinda strange. (Laughs). With that kinda thing, but...

PP: (To VP) I have a question for you.

VP: (To PP) Yeah, what's that?

PP: (To VP) So with them knowing...(VP laughs). I know I'm not supposed to interview her, but I am. (VP laughs). With them knowing, would they know based on the dialect?

VP: Definitely!

PP: Oh okay.

VP: I would say because the dialect... you could tell a person the way they spoke, from the island. Because they had, I would call it Gullah. They would be talkin a little bit Gullah. I would play around with it, but I'm not really a Gullah person. Cause I remember when I first moved, when we moved to North Carolina, and I told the lady where I was from and she was so excited. "Oh, could you speak a little Gullah for me?!" And I was like, "I really don't know Gullah like that." But I did a little bit, you know. "What you talkin bout?" something like that. You know, but it wasn't really Gullah. Cause I'm not too familiar with it. But...

PP: I think what helps the two of us because I know my transition was coming from the city life here. People could tell that you weren't from here. Because you pronounce your words, pronunciation, you know, you had a little roughness about you because the street life. Stuff like that. And you could kinda tell that you weren't from here. "Like man, you pronounce your words well, your diction is so good, like you're not from here." Like, no. I'm not from here. So you get words that they use and it's like, "So why do you talk like this?" Like well, we're from the island. We speak Gullah. "Well, what is Gullah?" So with me, it was a learning process for me. You know, even though, like I say thirty miles from here, my mother grew, you know, up here. Thirty miles away, but the dialect was not the same as it was for the island people. So... but that was a huge transition for myself.

Unknown (offscreen): Was it hard to be accepted into this community?

PP: It was hard at first because of the "Northerners" you have. You don't trust the Northerners. Because, you know, slicksters as we would call. So you know, they slick, they hustlers, that type thing. But in reality, I mean it kinda goes both ways. Because you have country hustlers just like you have city hustlers. So it's just a little different. Different things that you do. "Here's a different way to do this." So eventually you migrate into friendships because they see that you still have a lot of things in common. It's just that you do it in a different manner.

Unknown (offscreen): Can you talk more about your church community here as opposed to other places you've been? Is there... can you uh... are there any differences or different expectations or the way you worship?

PP: Well, from the city life, it was more of old school traditional. Lot of things that you could not do. Certain churches in the area believe that, you know, women couldn't do certain things. Men couldn't do certain things. And then it was a lot of, you couldn't go to the beach, you couldn't go to the movies, couldn't play sports. You know, because they were tryna base salvation based on being real strict and saying that if you do it this way, then God accepts you as opposed to now

the transition that churches have made is that you now fully understand the scriptures, where God is really concerned with the heart as opposed to the out appearance of a person. Because often times, we work on the outer and the inner is still messed up. And that's the focus that we now put in the 21st century, is let's work on your inside before your outside. Because if the inside is worked on and is changed and is cleansed, then you'll know how to dress, how to conduct yourself, where to go, where not to go and then you gotta grow from that. And that's something that now we teach our young children, and even with our congregation. Our older generation now has even accepted that based on scriptures. Not based on someone telling you, "If you do this, then you're not accepted in the church." So now the church has as broadness perspective because now we're being taught more in bible study.

Unknown (offscreen): Do you all utilize the praise house on the island or...?

PP: Um, I've never seen it used since I've been here. Really can't say that.

Unknown 2 (offscreen): So what made you move back here? When... Because you traveled a lot of places. What made you pick this as home?

PP: As home? This is on a spiritual note. Along with my pastor, Pastor Daniel Russell Jr., we left New Life Deliverance Temple, which is less than two miles from Penn Center. You know, church things sometimes go wrong. We left church out of anger and saying, okay things aren't going well. People are not understanding the vision because at that time Pastor Russell was a young pastor, in his thirties. His vision was a little aggressive for this area, and because you know, city life was progressive as opposed to the country-life is, okay we change as needed. We're not changing because we have to, because we see things futuristic. And he saw a lot of things futuristic. So, his vision, I believe, was a little too strong for...

VP: It was before the time.

PP: For that time. (VP chuckles). He saw a lot of the growth before the growth took place. And when we left, God took us to North Carolina to serve in ministry with Bishop Harold Lobby Williams, Shirley Ceasar's husband. He worked there for five years and church grew, things of that nature, and pretty much what took place here, took place there in North Carolina. Because it's like, okay we want change, but we don't want the change that fast. So, of course, we parted ways there. And God commissioned us to come back here. Because in life sometimes we fail at things and we never grow from it because we never go back and correct it. And God commissioned us to come back and correct what we messed up. So that the church could grow as well as we can grow. And the church saw that when we came back, they saw the growths and you guys have grown and we have grown, but now we all need to grow together to better serve our community and to better serve our church.

Unknown (offscreen): Is it difficult coming back, knowing that you have the same elders or the same environment?

PP: No, because a lot has transitioned. A lot has taken place since we left, you know. Left a church that was three-four hundred strong and when we came back, a lot of things took place. But I believe a lot of people saw the importance of the pastor that God had designed for New Life. And the church made the call for him to come back in 2007. Knowing his aggressiveness as a leader and with him returning, you know, the church is growin. You know, well over two hundred now. And the church now has it's own school, New Life Christian Academy, which goes from kindergarten to twelfth grade. So a lot has taken place, and the church is actually seeing it. You know, because of his aggressiveness as a leader.

Unknown 2 (offscreen): So you left with the pastor and you came back with the pastor?

PP: (Nods). Yes ma'am.

VP: With some breaks in there.

PP: We had one break. Right. I cut a little short. So, we had one break. When I left North Carolina, God commissioned me to go to Jacksonville, Florida, when my baby brother was pastoring here. And to go serve with them in ministry. And what God showed me, in that helped mentor him as a pastor, even though I've never pastored. But I've always been under my pastor, for well over twenty-something odd years so it's a lot that he taught me behind the scenes as a young preacher. You know, if God commissions you to go as a pastor, so then you know the ends and out of the church, you know the do's and don'ts. So it's a lot that I share with my brother in Jacksonville and we walked in ministry faithfully there, two years until God commissioned us to come back here.

Unknown 2 (offscreen): Good choice!

PP: (Nods). Good choice.

Unknown (offscreen) Could you briefly tell us about life prior to the bridge.

VP: Life prior to the bridge? Well before the bridge, I was discussing it with my grandmother, tryna refresh my memory. Because I was a little girl, I was probably about four or five. So, I just remember, you know, playing in the yard, in the grass, all that. You know, being outside a lot and stuff. And then I remember them telling us, "We're gonna have to move." And I didn't wanna leave my little, you know, little house there. It was like a two-bedroom; a small house. You know, and I was like, "Well, what's gonna happen to my swing set?" You know, I used to love my little swing set in the back. And we had a goat, and all that country area, you know. I'm

just lookin like, how they gone put a bridge here. But, she said it's gone be alright. And then I remember when we moved, they showed me the outline, the structure of the new home. And I got to choose my own room. I never had my own room before that, so I choose my own room. I was so happy. It was a three-bedroom, you know, two-bath. I said, oh we moving up. That was pretty good. And so when we moved, it was actually our house there and another business, Buff's. And that's a like... they do signs, and trophies and stuff like that. So they... the city asked us to move. But we really didn't have a choice. They just gave my grandparents like a little amount of money, which I felt like, now that I'm older, he coulda got way more. Cause you know, they needed that bridge. But, you know, back then they was just like, "You gotta move cause we're gonna start building at that certain time." And so, when I saw the bridge, I could not believe, that you know, that that huge thing was gonna come through here. And it just look so strange cause I remember. I still could see my little house right there. And then for that road to come through there was like, wow. (Chuckles). When we moved away and I came back, and then I told my children, my daughters. I was like, "Our house used to be right there." And they're looking at me like, "Mom, ain't no house used to be right there." And they couldn't believe it. And I'm sad that we didn't have like a picture to show the difference. We have a picture of the house, but it doesn't make it look like where, you know, the way you take a picture. We should've been like across the street of it to see. But I thought I was interested and seeing how the job changes of the town came about. With something small like that, but they needed that bridge. It was well needed. So...

Unknown 2 (offscreen): And, how old are your children?

VP: I have a sixteen year old, thirteen, and nine. All girls.

PP: Pray for me. (Everyone laughs).

Unknown 2 (offscreen): Yeah, I know. What schools do they go to?

VP: Well, my oldest actually goes to our church school, New Life Deliverance. New Life Christian Academy. And she's been there since ninth grade. She's going to the eleventh grade and she's planning on graduating this year, cause the school allows them to, you know, focus on their subjects. So, by her focusing so well, she's gonna be able to graduate early. And she'll be taking some college courses, also at the technical college, while she's doing that. And then my middle daughter goes to Beaufort Middle and my youngest goes to Mossy Oaks Elementary.

PP: (To VP) And you're in school.

VP: Yeah, I'm in school. (Chuckles). Yeah, I'm in school but... (Chuckles)

PP: Yeah, she's in school for nursing.



VP: Yeah, I've decided to go back to school, further my education in nursing. So...

Unknown (offscreen): Are there a lot of job opportunities here on the island? In this area?

VP: I would say, not really.

PP: Yeah, not on the island.

VP: In the medical field, I would say, that's why I transitioned to that. I actually used to be a hair stylist. And the town is so small, when I came back, it's like what sense does it make for me tryin to build up my clientele when everybody got they set hairstylist that they go to here. And it's like a whole lot of hair stylists, so you know. I always said, well let me. I always thought about the medical field. When I was younger. But when you're younger, you wanna get something fast. Cause you lookin at how long you gotta be in school, so I just decided to myself. I talked to my husband, we just decided. You know, we're gonna sacrifice and let me go back to school. And do this, the nursing, pursue that.

Unknown 2 (offscreen): So have you just started...?

VP: Well, I been doing like the prerequisite classes. And so eventually in January, I'll be getting into the program. So I just got that one more step and then I'll be on my way. (Chuckles).

Unknown (offscreen): Well, we would like to thank you all for sitting down with us and telling us your experience. Today is July 23, 2012, here at the Penn Center at Danez House.

**[End]**