



LIFE

on the Family

Preserving North Carolina's Coastal Heritage Through Oral Histories



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LIFE ON THE PAMLICO

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HUM 120 Cultural Studies

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Editor's Foreword

Welcome to the Fall 2010 issue of *Life on the Pamlico* – a journal of oral histories from residents of coastal North Carolina. This issue is a continuation of a tradition at Beaufort County Community College that dates back to 1981.

Originally published in paperback, *LOTP* is now published exclusively online. Earlier issues have been digitized and are available via <http://circanceast.beaufortccc.edu>.

The format has changed from a question and answer style to biographical narratives. Students in my Cultural Studies college transfer class spent this Fall semester interviewing residents of our area (most of whom are relatives), and wrote their stories to preserve the richness that was their way of life—for generations to come. Find a comfortable chair, pour a glass of sweet tea, and learn about how life used to be—Down East Style.

Bryan A. Oesterreich

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Maggie Yager Speller Moore

the last one standing

RYDIA MOORE SPENCER

As I drove up to the house and stopped, the cats came down the walkway to greet me and escorted me to the house. The sound of the television coming from the bedroom struck my ears immediately as I stepped in. Maggie has a hearing loss, but refuses to wear a hearing aid, so she plays the television very loud. I made my way through the living room and entered her bedroom where she was sitting on the side of the bed watching one of her favorite television programs. She spends most of her time in her bedroom and this is where everyone gathers whenever they visit. Immediately I grabbed the remote control and turned the television's volume down. Join me as she shares her story.



Maggie Yager Speller Moore was born October 19, 1926, in Belhaven to Sarah Gibbs Speller and Robert Speller in a small white house with a picket fence on the corner of George and King streets. Maggie is the youngest of five children: James, Willie, Beatrice, David, and Maggie.

She, as well as my Uncle David, (nicknamed Buddy) lived most of her childhood in Hyde County with her mother's parents Mary and Zoin Gibbs. Her grandparents were sharecroppers and moved several times living in the communities of California, Maple Town, Hyland and finally Juniper Bay, North Carolina. Most of these houses were two to three rooms with a kitchen sitting off from the main house. The kitchens didn't have a floor, just a wood stove to cook on, an icebox to keep the food, and a table. When they moved to Juniper Bay, they had a

two-story house with a kitchen in the main house. There was a hand pump in the kitchen to get water and a cistern outside they had to draw water from.

There weren't any neighbors around so she only got to play with brother "Buddy" and her cousins Hurley, Annie and William. When they did have playtime, they played jump rope or they would watch the older young men play horseshoes. "We didn't have much time for playing or school, because we had to work on the farm." She would plow the field, helped cut the grain and did everything her brother and cousins did. They worked from sun up to sun down on the farm.

She doesn't remember how old she was, but remembers having what they called the "seven year itch." A certain time of year, she would get blisters that would turn into sores on her legs and on her head. Her grandmother would wrap her legs so that the chickens wouldn't pick them when she went out to play.

One of most precious memories of her childhood was when her grandfather bought her a pony and saddle. She loved to ride that pony, but then

. . . then one day they had a big snow storm, and they put that pony in the kitchen to keep him warm.

one day they had a big snow storm and they put the pony in the kitchen to keep him warm. This particular kitchen didn't have a floor in it and the pony got sick and died (they think from pneumonia).

They raised everything they ate on the farm so the only time they went to town (Swan Quarter) was to buy shoes. Her grandmother made most of their

clothes but she remembers once getting a blue dress from an assistance program.

Of course she came to Belhaven to visit her parents, but spent most of that time at her Uncle Abbie and Aunt Alice's playing with her cousins. She had lots of stories to tell about her visits with her uncle. Some were scary, but most were hilarious. Uncle Abbie had a mean streak in him, but she loved to visit him anyway.

When she was five years old, she and my Aunt Bea were on their way to Mrs. Lizzie Palmer's house one day to get a lunch bucket for her momma. Grandma needed a lunch bucket large enough to pack lunch for the three of them to take to fields to work. Although they were young, they would sometimes accompany their momma to the fields. They lived on George Street and

had to go on the back street (Duke) to get to where Mrs. Lizzie lived. The streets weren't paved and had grass growing in the center of the street.

She remembered one day Bea yelled, "something bit me," and when they looked down they saw a snake (it was a water moccasin) swiveling off. She hadn't even realized that the snake had bitten her at first until she looked at her ankle and saw it already started to swell. She didn't even make it back to the house before she collapsed. She can't recall everything that happened but she knew her entire leg was swollen "real big." The doctor visited her everyday telling grandma different things to try. They buried her leg in the ground for hours to help draw the poison from her body. They placed a clock outside with her but she can't remember how long she was buried but she can recall the pulling feeling in her leg. Then they told grandma to catch a frog and split it open and place on her ankle. She was a very sick child and it was about six months before she fully recovered.

There were also fond memories of her childhood with her parents. Most of her memories were from her father because her mother died when she was nine years old. My grandfather was a carpenter, and he built them a miniature church and house to play with; they were unique—one of a kind. The church was like the First Baptist Church right in our neighborhood. "Papa carved everything with his knife: the pulpit, church benches, and he even had people sitting in the church." He also made them a house like the one they lived in. "The house we lived in had a white picket fence around the yard."

When she was in Hyde County, she attended St. Mary Disciples Church. Of course they had to walk while their grandmother rode in the horse and buggy. In the summer, by the time they got to church, they were covered with dust from head to toe. In the winter their feet and hands would be frozen. She enjoyed going with her grandmother to the different churches in the union. Her mother was affiliated with the Sanctified Church as they called it. People would come from all around for weekly meetings. She loved to hear the people beating drums and playing guitars. Sometimes they would have prayer meetings at the member's homes. Laughing, she explained that Papa wouldn't allow them to come to his house though: "they won't jump my floors out he said." Uncle Abbie wouldn't let them come to his house either.

At the age of fifteen, Uncle Frank (Aunt Odie's husband) took her and her cousin Hurley to Norfolk, VA for a week stay where he was working. The excitement was overwhelming because they had never left North Carolina before. He "rolled out the red carpet" for them she said. He bought them new outfits, sent them to the beautician and to top it all off, brought both of them a

gold tooth. “I’m not taking about that stuff they buy now to put over your teeth, I’m talking the real stuff.”



When she was eighteen, she moved back to Belhaven to live with her Papa. This is when she met Joe Will Moore, whom she would eventually marry. Grandpa Speller became very sick in 1947, so my Aunt Bea moved back home with her two oldest children. In December 1947, grandpa died. They traveled to Bertie for the funeral but it was dark when they got there so they returned to Belhaven that night leaving their uncle to bury the next day. That was the first and last time she ever visited Bertie. She never met any of her father’s family except his brother Sam that came down to visit when her father got sick.

In January 1948, her first child was born, my brother Kermit. In 1950 my brother Donnie was born. In June 1952, she married Joe Will, and in December, my brother Clinton (nicknamed Peanut) was born. Finally, in May 1954, she got her only girl, Rydia.

In February 1955, tragedy struck. Joe Will was killed. At age 29, she was a widow with four children to rear. She had male companions over the years, but never remarried. The only family she had in Belhaven was her sister who shared the three room house their Papa had built. Bea and Maggie would live together in that three room house for over twenty years with their fourteen children.

They didn’t have all the luxuries we have today in our homes. They had no luxury bathroom; they had a wash pan and foot tub to bathe in. A “slop bucket” was kept in the hallway at night and taken to the toilet house the next morning. They had wood floors they scrubbed down on their knees with lye to include the toilet. Washing was done using a washboard. It would be so cold in the winter that the clothes would freeze before they could hang them on the clothes line.

There’s an old saying “it takes a village to raise a child.” She didn’t have a village, but she did have the neighborhood. Kermit would spend most of his time with Mr. Hubert and Mrs. Esther Hogan, Rydia would be with Mrs. Lizzie Bonner and later Mr. Edward and Mrs. Mildred Burrus, and Donnie and Peanut would be in Hyde County with our Aunts Eva and Odie.

She received a small check from the Army because Joe Will was a veteran. That wasn't really enough to support her family. Back then, local merchants would allow you to get the things you needed during the month and settle the account on check day. We had an account with Mr. Shorty Windley, a white merchant.

To help support her family, she started working at the Clyde Potter Crab House with her sister, cracking claws. My cousin Linda would be in charge of the house while they were at work. Our treat for being good was they would bring home a bag of "yis diddy"—day old donuts and cinnamon buns from the local bakery.

Over the years, she also worked on Cy Rich Farms in beans, potatoes, various other crops and the root field. Sometimes, she would take me and my cousins with her to work in the fields. Later she worked in Pitt and Greene counties in the tobacco fields. In the late sixties, she started working at Baker's Crab Company. This would be her last job.

When old man Baker died, his son Georgie took over the business and Maggie had seniority. Unfortunately, Georgie told them that no one was to bother her and she did just as she pleased. I told him he had "created a monster." By this time, she only had to wash pans, but she would help some of the other workers by pulling the backs off the crabs. Whenever they had a special order for cocktails, it was her job to crack the claws.

The foreman declared that everyday Maggie would lose money in the drink machine, so they automatically had two quarters for her every day. Even today, Georgie will sometimes give me two quarters to give her or stop by her house and leave two quarters on the coffee table.

Baker's Crab Company was sold to Sea Safari, but she still had seniority. Maggie met many new friends including the migrant workers. Everybody loved her. I didn't have to worry because I knew they would take care of her. If she didn't come to work, they would check on her because they knew she never missed work. At age 84 she was still working and is ready to work now, but they closed in 2009.

Though she worked for many years, all of the work she ever did was seasonal. When she wasn't working, her favorite pastime was, and still is, playing cards. I remember we used to meet at Clarice's house during the winter months after the crab house closed, to play spades. Maggie and Clarice were always partners and they were good. We would have so much fun, they would win the majority of the time but you really couldn't get mad at them. Sometimes she would tell me, "Momma hate to do this to you baby, but you better get your coat because it's cold in Boston."

When she said that I knew they had a dynamite hand, and we wouldn't get a single book. She loves playing all kinds of cards.

Maggie never traveled away from home much. In fact, she has lived in the same area since she moved back to Belhaven in 1946. We both had to laugh as she recalled her venture to Colorado with my brother Kermit when he was stationed at Fort Carson. "I've never been so scared in my life. Kermit was speeding around those mountains and it looked like we were going to fall off the side."

Kermit recalls his friend that lived next door to him in Colorado had a boa constrictor (named Christopher) as a pet, and they asked him to keep it while they were away for the weekend. We put the snake in the bathtub, but Maggie didn't know it. She went in to use the bathroom and the snake looked out from around the shower curtain. Maggie busted out of the bathroom screaming. She vowed, "Either he goes or I go." They had to move Christopher.

Then there was the trip that didn't happen. If it had, it would have gone down in history. When I was attending basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, I used to write home complaining about the legs hurting. One day I called home and talked with the aunt. "We'll be down there next week." What for I asked? "Little Sis (this is what she called my mother) said you were sick, so she hired Mr. Edward (the local cab driver) to take us down there to get you." All my friends teased me when I told them about it. They laughed as they explained that the headlines would read "Momma busts soldier out of Fort Jackson." I was her baby and she was going to see about me.



Maggie: Military Mom

Another trip she recalls was when she and my aunt visited me in Washington, D.C., for Thanksgiving. I lived on the first floor and had bars on the windows and patio door. Someone knocked at the door one morning and my cousins starting running because they were scared. "Bea told Maggie to get the knife, and she had the hammer. They got behind the door armed and ready if anyone tried to break in." When I got home from work we all laughed about what had happened.

She didn't just feel that way about me; it was the same for all her children and grandchildren. My brothers and son seem to think she cares more for me. I beg to differ. Everyone knows that her boys have a special place in her heart. Maggie has a caring spirit that she extends to everyone. She only has four children and five grandchildren, but she is a mother and grandmother figure to many. Her home is filled with pictures of babies and children from family and friends.

For her eightieth birthday celebration, I planned a special celebration at the Civic Center in Belhaven. I told her about it, but I didn't tell her that Peanut was coming home (he hadn't been over in probably five years or more). Maggie recalls she saw a car pull up in front of the house and saw a tall man get out. She is blind in one eye and didn't recognize who it was until he was on the porch. This was her big surprise.

Maggie says one of her most precious memories was in 2008. For the first time in over twenty years she had all her children home with her for Mother's Day. We gathered at my house for Sunday dinner and fellowship.



In addition to her love for her children and grandchildren, Maggie has a special love for animals. She can go on and on about her pets. The first dog I remember was Fuzzy, a large tan collie. She had several dogs and cats after that, but her long life companion was Jack. Jack became a member of the family, and she treated him just like he was one of her children, but then she treats all her pets like that. Jack's favorite food was chicken, and every Friday I stopped at KFC to get Maggie and Jack some chicken. Jack was so old that he had arthritis really bad and had to be put down. This was a sad day in our family.

After Jack, came the cats; although for awhile she had Tiger as Jack's companion. Now she has six kittens and five cats, but that number fluctuates between eight and fourteen total. When she was working she would crack the cats a pound of claw meat everyday. There is nothing too good for her cats. My cousin was trying to get her to visit her in New York but she responded that she

couldn't leave her cats because no one would look after them like she would. She further stated that: "you wouldn't leave your children by themselves and I'm not leaving mine."

Maggie cares for her pet just like a mother would her children. When the kittens are small she is up all through the night checking on them. She makes sure they are warm when it's cold and are protected from the rain. Not only does she worry about her pets, she has become the mother of the neighbor's dog also. She even threatens to call the police if they don't treat them right. She informed me the other day the dog had six puppies and immediately she is trying to make sure they are warm and taken care of.



In her eighty four years, Maggie has seen many disasters: hurricanes, ice storms, blizzards, forest fires and tornadoes. The most memorable one was Hurricane Hazel. Hazel has been declared the most devastating category 4 hurricane to hit eastern North Carolina. I was only five months old. She recalls the "army ducks" evacuating them from their home because there was so much water.

Thirty years later, Maggie would evacuate Belhaven once again, this time with my month old son, Perry. When I adopted my son, I left him in North Carolina with my mother for a week while I returned to Washington, D.C. to finalize arrangements for the newborn.

In September of 1984, Hurricane Diana hit North Carolina as a category 2 hurricane. I was terrified watching the news and being updated hourly by supervisors in the press release office as they tracked the storm; I knew my baby was in good hands with his grandmother. I was informed that Maggie was up all night watching over our little bundle of joy.

She is no Joan Clever or Clair Huxtable; she is however, a caring and loving person, mother, grandmother, aunt, cousin and friend. She is my Mom and I love her dearly. She is the oldest member of my family, the only surviving child of Robert and Sarah Speller. It has been truly a pleasure and privilege to sit with her, to listen to her story, and to share it with you.

Mary Wood Wallace

a life full of blessings

KATHLEEN WARREN

On January 12, 1919, the population of Hertford, NC, grew by one. This was the day that Mary Wingfield McMullan Koonce and Benjamin Grenade Koonce welcomed their first of two children into the world. Mary Wood Koonce Wallace was born in a white clapboard house that was nestled on the muddy banks of the Perquimans River. Her younger brother Ben joined the family three years later. The quiet, little, 2.7 sq. mile, town is where Mary Wood spent the first 25 years of her life.

The greater part of those 25 years was spent in the “Shannonhouse House,” which was named for the family that had lived there before the Koonce’s made it their home. It was a three-story, three-bedroom,



Mary Wood with Mother



Mary Wood with Ben

and one-bath home on Main Street, directly across the street from the Hertford Hotel. The kitchen held an ice box and a coal burning stove used for cooking. During the summer months, a kerosene stove was used for cooking, to help limit the heat inside the house. There were two rooms, a separate kitchen, and a “catch all” storage room, that were attached to the house only by a latticed porch. The family would often sit together to eat meals on this porch when the weather was pleasant.

The third floor was one open room that ran the length of the house and was the site where many memories were made. Mary Wood and her younger brother Ben both found joy on that third floor throughout the years, but in

much different ways. Ben, a more solitude soul, spent many hours exploring the treasures that had been left by former inhabitants. Some of his loot included letters from the Civil War, complete with the Confederate stamps and money. Mary Wood, more of a social butterfly, would gather friends and perform 'shows' on the third floor. Often her mother was their only audience, but she loved watching the shows as much as they loved performing them. "We charged two pins as admission to the show." Mary Wood's mother was a seamstress, so she was always sure to have the admission fee.

Mary Wood recalls with fondness, "mother made all of my clothes and they were pretty clothes." As she grew into a young lady, her mother would design gowns and dresses for her to wear to the dances that she would come to love. At the time, there was no place in Hertford to purchase clothing. While her mother worked at sewing clothes for her, music could usually be heard playing throughout the house. Sometimes from the family radio that her daddy truly loved and other times it was the heavenly sounds of her brother Ben at the piano. "He was a natural, and good at everything he tried."

Although her mother did not work outside of the home, she was a busy woman. She spent a large portion of her time selflessly volunteering throughout the community. She was the grade school's PTA president for many years, "even long after Ben and I were grown." Of all the things she gave her time to, her favorite was the local theatre. Two of her passions were music, which Ben inherited, and dance, which Mary Wood inherited. She would put Mary Wood up on stage to shine every chance she had.

Many local businesses would hold theatre productions as fundraisers, and Mary Koonce would often help put the productions together. Her jobs included organizing the music, making costumes, and she was sometimes asked to help cast the shows. Whenever a child's part was available, she would quickly fill the spot with her young daughter. "They were just small, three act plays."

While her mother worked at sewing clothes for her, music could usually be heard playing throughout the house. Sometimes from the family radio that her daddy truly loved and other times it was the heavenly sounds of her brother Ben at the piano.

Perhaps this is what fostered Mary Wood's never ending love to dance. "All I ever wanted to do was dance."

School years were very special to Mary Wood, although it was a rough start. Her kindergarten career was short lived because she contracted whooping cough and had to remain home for the rest of the year. The law at the time dictated that students had to turn six before January 1st in order to begin first grade. The following year Mary Wood missed that deadline by 12 days. "Mother had me inoculated and sent me anyway." It took one week for the school to learn of the 'mistake' and she was, again, sent home until the following year. She recalls an incident, when she was finally able to attend school, in first grade when she was sent to the cloak room for eating an apple. "I didn't know I couldn't eat an apple in class, nobody told me," she says with a soft giggle.



Mary Wood: School Days

Another special memory of her school years is the many times her mother would show up and 'surprise' her and her classmates on her birthday. She would bring a big cake with candles and ice cream bars for her and the class to celebrate. "No presents and no one left uninvited," she says with a smile.

Many of the relationships that Mary Wood holds so dear to her heart were formed throughout her school years. "There was a group of us, about 16 or so, that went all through grade school and high school together. We played together, we grew up together, we were always together." They were as close as any friends could be. "If we wanted to go out at midnight and play 'kick the tin can' we did, but we all did it together." At the age of 91, she still goes back to Hertford to visit

from time to time and often runs into some of the old crowd. “We’re as close now as we ever were. Well, you know those of us that are still around.”

One of those friends that are still around is a gentleman named James. He loved to dance almost as much as Mary Wood did. As a teenager, he worked in the local drug store that Mary Wood frequently stopped in to purchase a Coke. They both looked forward to summer in Hertford because that meant street dances with an orchestra. “See you Saturday at the dance Mary Wood?” The answer was always “yes,” and when they would meet, no one would be dancing. “We always got things started.” They would have a dance or two together, then they would go their separate ways until next time. There was never anything romantic between the two of them, just very close friends. “Having so many good friends all living in a small town was a wonderful, wonderful existence.”

Of all the blessings in her life, she counts her brother Ben at the top of the list. “He was very, very dear to me.” She recalls a time that their church had spent thousands of dollars on a new organ system and Ben would have given anything to get his hands on it. “He probably could’ve played better than the organist.” One day he came home and asked Mary Wood to guess where he had been. She never would have guessed that he had been down to the church playing that glorious instrument, but he had. Apparently, he decided to write a letter to the company that made the organ and explain that he was the assistant organist and had lost his key to the organ. They sent him a key and he snuck in to make beautiful music and snuck back out without being discovered. Mary Wood’s face lights up when she tells me, “I can’t be certain, but I’m pretty sure my mother helped him write that letter.”

Benjamin Koonce, Mary Wood’s father, was a bookkeeper, and worked for the town of Hertford for many years. They lived comfortably, but were not wealthy. He was able to provide his family with a home that had electricity, indoor plumbing, a piano for Ben, a wide open area for Mary Wood to dance in, an occasional hired hand to help his wife, and a tremendous amount of love. He was a hard worker that could always make his family laugh. “The fires in those old Wilson heaters and the food on the table made us comfortable and happy.”

Mary Wood’s eyes get a little sparkle in them when she starts talking about her daddy. He was not a man of many words but his “deep sense of humor, quick wit, genial answers and contributions made each thing he said worthwhile.” She tells me how she can sometimes still picture him mowing the grass and chopping wood for the heaters and how he would help her mother prepare Sunday dinner. Her daddy had a love for books and she recalls watching him sit

in his rocking chair reading a paperback, with a couple on the cover dressed in very little. “I would ask him if it was a good book and he would say, not nearly as good as the cover.”

Talking about her father brings back a few memories of Christmas growing up. She remembers that they received their gifts from Santa in the dining room where their stockings were hung from the mantle over the Wilson heater. “They weren’t the fancy stocking with pictures and names on them like we have today. They were a pair of daddy’s knee socks.” She and Ben’s both had the same things in them. They each would have an apple, an orange, an assortment of nuts, colorful hard candy and fresh raisins, “dried and still on the vine.” “By the time we emptied our stockings the heat from the heater had softened the candy, which was then covered with fuzz from daddy’s socks. It was so good.” One of the gifts that she remembers receiving was a Victrola with a wind up handle and nursery figures painted on the sides. There were also toys, books and clothes every year but her fondest memories of Christmas will always be those stockings and of course, plum pudding.

One luxury that the family did not have was a motor vehicle. Living in such a small town “we had no need for a car.” They walked everywhere they wanted or needed to go. If the occasion arose that they would be traveling they would ride with a family member that had a car. This would be the case during the summer months when Mary Wood’s aunt and uncle would rent a house in Nags Head. The house was usually rented for the entire summer and the Koonce’s would often join them for family vacations.

Around the age of eight, and continuing into her late teens, Mary Wood would spend most of her summers in Chapel Hill, NC. Her aunt Inez (dad’s sister) lived there, and was the first dean of women at UNC Chapel Hill. She enjoyed these trips to visit her aunt immensely. She especially enjoyed the many dances and social functions that the big city had to offer. On one occasion she was even invited to attend the Governor’s Ball, to which she regretfully declined. She did attend many of the weekly dances that were held for the college’s student body. She formed many friendships throughout this time that she will always hold dear.

After completing high school, Mary Wood continued her education with two years of college. During her first year of college in Greensboro, she majored in liberal arts and then she attended ECU as a ‘day student’ to gain some clerical skills so that she could find employment. She found a job in Weeksville, NC, at what would eventually become the ‘Lighter than Air’ naval base. This facility made and housed naval blimps, but Mary Wood originally worked directly with the contractors that were building the base. When the job was complete, the company asked her to

stay on with them but she did not want to relocate to Tennessee for the next job, so she decided to take a Civil Service exam and upon passing became an employee for the United States Navy.

One of her responsibilities was to keep up the paperwork on the employees. She remembered with great detail an older gentleman named Cornelius Baum that worked there as well. The driver that Mr. Baum counted on for transportation to and from work was involved in an accident and this left him having to walk several miles to work every morning and he was late every day.

When payday came around she took the paperwork explaining why Mr. Baum had been late everyday to her boss. This paper work was accompanied by a request to pay Mr. Baum for all of his hours. Her boss refused to pay Cornelius for the hours he spent walking to work and Mary Wood felt this was not acceptable. She announced that she would not leave until he put an 'A' (for approved) on the time sheet. Her boss could see she was serious and finally gave in, approved her request, and sent her on her way. When she arrived back at her office on the other side of the base she was told that they had received a call telling them, "Don't ever let Ms. Koonce come over here to my office again." Her eyes lit up as she told me, "We all looked out for each other. It was the right thing to do."

This naval station is where Mary Wood was on December 7, 1941, the day Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese. "We were already at war with Germany and Adolph Hitler and his regime and we certainly were not ready to expose our left hand as well as our right." For many people those years were sad and difficult ones. The rationing of gasoline, food, and other commodities made everyday life hard but the separations and loss of lives was heart breaking.

As difficult as life was during this time for a young women like Mary Wood, it was also, at times, quite exciting. Officer's clubs, as well as USO's were plentiful and many young women met their husbands at these social events. Mary Wood loved the USO because it was yet another opportunity to dance. There was even an occasion when she participated in a dance competition at the USO and walked away with a first place trophy in the fast dance portion for her performance of the jitterbug. These events became very important to her and so many others during this time. "It didn't take away the concern—just made it more bearable."

During her work at the Lighter Than Air Base, she met a gentleman by the name of Ralph Wallace. Ralph was a handsome young man from Knoxville, TN, that had been living a comfortable life and attending the University of Tennessee. One day he decided to accompany a friend to the recruiting offices, and he would later jokingly say that he went for the free physical

but left the office enlisted in the US Navy. By the time Mary Wood met him he was an officer and he swept her off her feet. World War II was in full swing and Ralph was a lieutenant aviator pilot that was stationed at Harvey Point, which is about 12 miles from Hertford.

Their meeting was quite by chance and took place during a blind date. "I never liked blind dates, but agreed to it as a favor to a friend." I saw a bit of a sparkle in her eye when she chuckled and told me that Ralph was her friend's date and not hers. It wasn't long before he made it known that he was much more smitten with her. From then on it was quite a whirlwind romance. They spent most of next two months together and they both were dreading Ralph's inevitable return to war in the Pacific.

He did return to duty and over the next ten months their love continued to grow, but instead of it growing on a dance floor to the jitterbug, it grew on paper with heartfelt, written words. Daily letters were written and that Christmas he arranged to have a gift sent to her. It was a lovely brooch with matching earrings. But it was in a letter received in late November that her real gift was received when Ralph proposed marriage. He was not able to tell her when he would be home but intimated that it would be soon. She learned of his return to the states when a friend called and told her that he had seen Ralph's plane on an airfield in Texas with foot-high letters that said, "MARY WOOD, HERE I COME."



It had been a long year but it had finally ended, and Ralph returned to her. They had two weeks to plan the church wedding that her mother had always wanted her to have. During those two weeks they had fourteen different parties. Even with the short time to plan the wedding was beautiful, with the bride and her attendants in white with the attendants carrying bouquets of red

flowers. The groom and his attendants were adorned in their blue, Naval uniforms. The occasion was as patriotic as it was elegant. On January 9, 1945, Ms. Mary Wood Koonce became Mrs. Ralph Wallace.

Within days Ralph had to report to Banana River Air Station in Florida (now the home of Cape Canaveral) for a six-month training course before his return to the Pacific. These 6 months were spent in a bit of luxury. They lived in a hotel that catered to the military men and their families and Mary Wood spent her days as a new bride being waited on and basking on the end of the pier with a fishing pole, waiting for Ralph to return for the day. She lights up when she tells me how she would sit out on that pier and Ralph would fly his plane over and ‘wave’ a wing at her. His fly-overs more than made up for the fact that she never caught anything except “blow fish and baby sharks.”

While the life of luxury could not go on forever, the newlyweds were looking forward to sharing their lives together and seeing what adventures were in store. During the next year Ralph returned to the Pacific and Mary Wood returned to Hertford and her old job. Although this separation was difficult, she had friends and family to help her through it. Before she knew it Ralph was home again and their adventures would begin.

Over the next several years they would call many places home. One of the first was a small apartment in Washington, DC. Ralph had purchased all the previous owners’ furnishings for \$120 so Mary Wood’s hopes of decorating their first home were sort of dashed but the disappointment was short lived. “I had so many blessings in my life I couldn’t count them.” By the time they moved into this first apartment Mary Wood was expecting their first angel and on December 9, 1946, they became the proud parents of a precious baby girl named Frances (Fran) Dabney Wallace. Soon after they welcomed their new addition it was again time to relocate. This time they were off to California.

After spending a short year on the west coast the shallow roots were yet again pulled up and they were replanting in Norfolk, VA. It was here that they celebrated Fran’s third birthday, seven days after the arrival of their second angel, Mary McMullan Wallace. By 1951 they were gracing the state of Ohio with their presence where Ralph taught ROTC classes at Ohio State University and Mary Wood was the ever doting mother to their two happy girls.

The family eventually ended up back in the nation’s capital for a short time. By this point the girls were old enough to be involved in school and extracurricular activities. Mary Wood spent many, many dedicated hours as a brownie/girl scout leader. She was usually the one to oversee all of the

cookie and calendar sales not for one troop but seven. She did well more than her fair share and was happy to be able to do it.

While their girls were young, Mary Wood and Ralph did their best to pass on their values and faith. This included a big involvement in their church and its activities. She tells me about a comical but obviously special memory of when the girls were young and attending Sunday school. She always looked forward to hearing about what her youngest, Mary Mac, would say that she had learned that day. She chuckled as she told me about the day Mary Mac (in her own words) learned how Jesus turned water into beer and on another Sunday she retold the story of Daniel Boone and the Lion's Den. Their faith in family, friends, and God was and is still strong.

In September of 1958, the family boarded the S.S. United States ocean liner, and set sail for a new adventure in England. The next few years were spent here and many new friendships were built. It was "another blessing" for her and the girls to be able to experience life abroad and to learn new customs and traditions outside of their own. It was also during these years that sadly, Mary Wood lost her beloved father. While the loss was devastating for her, she was thankful that she was able to travel back home and see her daddy and share some final goodbyes before he was called home. Those last days will forever be cherished.

While relocating every few years had its downside and could be difficult for the whole family, none of them would have changed it. Having to leave a house that was just starting to feel like home and leaving friends was always hard and sometimes heartbreaking. "Our things were what made it home for us. We might have been in a strange new place but as soon as we had our furniture and things in place then it was home."

It was a few years after the family's return from England that Ralph's duty to the United States Navy was complete and retirement was on the horizon. Their girls were growing into beautiful young adults and were working toward their own futures, Fran as a school teacher and Mary Mac as a veterinarian. In 1967 Ralph received a phone call, complete with a business proposition that he readily accepted.

This proposition was to take over the management of the Beaufort Hyde newspaper and this was when they relocated for the last time. Belhaven, NC, welcomed them with open arms, and they knew right away that this would be their permanent home with many more adventures to come.

However, one of their many quests included the inevitable flooding of Belhaven every time a hurricane kissed the coast. As much as they loved this new little town they did not enjoy having

to put all their furniture up on cinder blocks every time a storm decided to visit. After repeated storms that left the need to rip up the carpet, replace sections of the walls, and have furniture re-upholstered, their home was the first in Belhaven to be raised by FEMA. Wading through the living room every couple of years was an adventure she was happy to leave behind.

As it turned out Ralph would run the newspaper for only a few years with Mary Wood by his side the entire time. “Of course I never made a cent,” she declares with a grin. When the time came to pass the paper on, Ralph was eager to move on to his next adventure, which included being the town manager for five years. Shortly after passing the newspaper on, Mary Wood received a phone call from the new manager, Dave Milligan saying, “Mary Wood, I need you.” The young lady that helped him at the paper had not shown up that day so she agreed, somewhat reluctantly, to go down and help out. As it turned out, Mary Wood continued ‘helping out’ for another twenty-five years. This time she was paid for her work.

During these years she became a mother-in-law, a grandmother, and a life-long friend to many. She even spent a couple years as local royalty when Ralph served as the Mayor of Belhaven for one term, from 1979-1981. “I wouldn’t let him run for a second term.” They watched in delight as their beautiful daughters married and began their own journeys with their own families. They would eventually bless Mary Wood with many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. While some of them were biological and others were gained through marriage, they were all family and all loved the same.

Upon completing college at MacMurray College, in Illinois, Fran married Dr.

Philip Rice and went on to become the mother of five beautiful children. Jennifer was the first born, then Adrienne, Justin, Allison, and Nathan. Mary Mac finished college and went on to earn the title of Dr. Mary Alexander DVM. She was married to a wonderful man named Bruce



Alexander, and while they never had children together, Bruce brought a wonderful son into the family with him named Brian. Her granddaughter Jennifer went on to bless Mary Wood with three precious great grandchildren: Emily, Jack and Henry. Adrienne blessed her with two more: Isabel and Ava. Brian was married and he and his wife were graced with three striking boys: Drew, Zachary, and Reece. “Every one of them is another blessing I have.”

Mary Wood became an active member of the Belhaven community right away and still remains active today. She has been a member of a local book club since moving to Belhaven and remains active still. They meet about twice a month and she was proud to declare, “I’m the oldest member.” She enjoys being an active member so much that she is the hostess and organizer of the annual Christmas party each year. She and Ralph were members of a supper club and enjoyed these activities for many years together. She has also enjoyed playing cards throughout the years and was part of two local bridge clubs with groups of friends who enjoyed each other’s company immensely.

Her love for theater that was instilled by her mother all those years ago is still strong and she is ever ready to join in the fun. She has performed in such productions as *South Pacific* and *Hello, Dolly* since she has lived in Belhaven. Another organization that she has graced with her presence is ‘The Red Hat Ladies’ and she remains an active member, volunteer, and former paid employee of the local senior center, where she has especially enjoyed the line dancing in the past. After her beloved Ralph passed in 1987, Mary Wood gradually phased out the supper club activities. “It was more of a couple’s thing and it just wasn’t the same after Ralph was gone.”

I am sure that Ralph was looking down with pride and joy when his darling was awarded a gold medal for one of her awesome writings, “Mother & Me.” She has built an entire collection of poetry and short stories that she collectively calls “Quilt Pieces.” These writings, I’m sure, will be passed down through the generations and will be a splendid gift for each and every person who gets the honor to read them. In 1995, Belhaven selected Mary Wood as their Outstanding Senior Citizen of the year, and you would have been hard pressed to find anyone who disagreed. Ralph was also smiling down with elation the day that his beautiful bride was chosen to be the Grand Marshall of the Belhaven 4th of July festivities. What an awesome mark of respect that no one deserved more than Mary Wood.

While hers has been a life full of blessings, the loss of her dear Ralph was not the only sadness she has had to endure. On Christmas morning in the year 2000, her son-in-law Bruce “died in the arms and home of those who loved him—A Christmas not to be forgotten but not willingly

remembered. But the reason for the celebration of that day lives forever and we thank the One who gave us Bruce—even for a little while.” In September of 2009, heartbreak struck again, when her dearly loved brother Ben was called home. This loss has perhaps been one of the most difficult to sustain. Her dear Ben never missed a Christmas, an Easter, a birthday, a Thanksgiving, or a Fourth of July. “He was always here to celebrate with me. He took care of his sister. We were always the best of friends.”

Belhaven, NC, truly received a gift the day that Mary Wood Koonce Wallace came to town. Just as Hertford, NC, must have wept with sadness the day that she left. She has graced many cities, both foreign and domestic, with her presence, and although I’ve only known her for a very short while, I am certain that she has left her mark across the globe. Anyone who meets her is sure to never forget her. Throughout our time together, she has continued to remind me of her many “blessings,” but every time we conclude a visit, I am the one who feels blessed. Mary Wood has led, and still continues to lead, a wonderful, exciting life. While I have attempted to give a glimpse into her wonderful life, there are not enough words to fully give it the honor that it deserves. She has been an inspiration to many in her 91 years, and if you mention her name around town, the first response you will receive is a smile.

Lena Mae Howard

making it against the odds

CATRENA ROSS-KEYS

One late, hot afternoon, in a wood slat home up a dusty long dirt path, a little girl was born and delivered by a well-known midwife from Blounts Creek, NC. This special day was September 24, 1931, and the little girl was Lena Mae Howard. She was born to Joseph and Roberta Howard. This birth of new life took place in Chocowinity, NC, which is about five miles from Blounts Creek. Lena was the newest edition to the Howard family. Joseph and Roberta were blessed several years prior to Lena's birth with another daughter, Hattie Louise Howard. Lena is not sure of her sister Hattie's exact date of birth.

Lena has been told that around 1932, Joseph and Roberta separated, going in different directions. No one ever told Lena the details or reasons for the separation, so that remains a mystery. Meanwhile, Lena's mother, Roberta, left and relocated up north, in the state of Connecticut. Her father, Joseph, remained in Chocowinity, and by doing so it left him to rear Lena and Hattie by himself. At the time that the separation took place, Lena was only nine months old and her sister Hattie was a little over two years old. This made Joseph feel that raising two girls on his own would be a bit too much for him. He decided to place Lena with a relative, one of his aunts, to raise as her own.

The aunt he placed Lena with was Clara Carter and she also lived in Blounts Creek. Her older sister, Hattie, was sent somewhere else and Lena is not sure where or who the person was that Hattie was sent to live with. Lena and her sister were unable and did not keep in contact with one another at any time after the separation. Lena never saw her sister again after this time. Clara Carter, also known as Ms. Classy to many but soon to be known to Lena as Momma, reared Lena like she was her very own child from day one.

Ms. Classy did have one biological child, a daughter. Her name was Ella Emma who later was well known to everyone by the nickname of "Pardner." This was because every day she and Lena would walk hand in hand and Lena said, "Ella was her Pardner." Pardner was married to Bonnie Williams on June 27, 1934, but they never had any children of their own. This made Lena very special to them also.

They all lived together in a white wood house with black shutters and a tall chimney made of gray cement block coming out the front right side of the roof. This house was up a long wooded

path with a dusty, dirt road. The house only had two bedrooms, a kitchen and a sitting area but the porch went around the entire house. There was not a bathroom on the inside of the house, only an outhouse that was about what we today would consider a block away. The outhouse was built of wood and inside it was an area formed like a shelf with a hole cut in the center to sit on. Beneath this was a hole that was dug in the ground and it was very deep and looked like it went on forever. Lena said, “It seemed like these holes never filled up.”

The floors in the house were made of long slats of wood and the windows were single glass panes. Baths were taken in wash pails in the bedroom and water was retrieved from the hand pump outside by the back porch. The pump supplied all the water for everything needed in and out of the house. This was one of the better houses in the neighborhood.

By the time Lena was eight or nine years old, she realized that they grew almost all the foods that they ate. Momma and Pardner had chickens and hogs that they raised as a source of meat for them to eat—and to sell. These animals were raised and attended to up until it was time to sell them or kill them for food. A garden was also a major part of their source of food. A lot of different vegetables were grown in the garden. There were collard greens, speckled butter beans, cucumber, and yellow squash, just to name a few. Fruit trees were also a big hit for making their own preserves for jams and jellies. They grew apple trees, plum trees, and peach trees and had many grape harbors. All the items grown provided the foods that were needed to enable them to eat year round.

Lena had many daily chores. Every morning she fed the chickens and slopped the hogs. She also cleared the weeds from the garden and picked the fruits and vegetables that were ready for harvest. Some of Lena’s chores were unforgettable to her she said, like her memories of chicken killing day.



While smiling, Lena said, “This whole day was a mess every time it came and believe me it was not easy” and she then went on to describe it. She said the morning would start with “catching the chickens, then chopping off the chickens’ heads with a long shiny axe, and then putting the chickens in boiling water.” This was to make the plucking of the feathers go easier.

Next came pulling every single feather from the chickens body. Some came out in handfuls, while some were a little harder to pull out than others and some came out just one at a time. The chickens were gutted with a silver-plated butcher knife, with all the insides removed and the livers and gizzards were saved to eat later and when eaten were considered as a delicacy. They

The chickens were prepared, some fried in lard that day and some saved for a later time, stewed on the stovetop and sometimes baked in the oven.

were washed up and made ready for cooking. The chickens were prepared, some fried in lard that day and some saved for a later time, stewed on the stovetop and sometimes baked in the oven. Lena stated, “Stewed chicken was her favorite.” Even the chicken feet were cooked. Most of the time this was done later as well and they were stewed with gravy.

Even with all the chores and the day-to-day life, Lena still made education a very important part of her daily living. Lena attended G. R. Whitfield School, which was located in Grimesland, NC. She remembers when going to school in 1937 the school was still segregated—blacks and whites did not mingle at all. Lena would ride with someone that lived close by that was on his or her way to work each morning. She would catch a ride from Blounts Creek to Chocowinity just



Lena: School Days

to attend school in Grimesland. If she didn't get to Chocowinity on time, she had to walk over five miles to school each day one-way.

Lena remembered one teacher, Mrs. Benson. She taught math, history and English and all these subjects were taught in one classroom. Back then she said they didn't change class like the children do today, and that they also had fewer teachers than we do now, therefore the teachers had to teach several subjects.

Lena dropped out of school when she was fourteen. As it turned out, she did not think school was as important to her any more, never mind the difficulty it took just to get to school from time to time. Her thoughts then turned to learning more about how to work on the farm beyond her normal chores. She felt this would better prepare her for life.

When Lena was ten, she had learned to work in tobacco and this came in handy more than ever because of her decision to drop out of school. There was a tobacco farm not too far from where Lena's family lived and Mr. Bonnie had worked for this farmer for several years. Lena was now going to work with the very same farmer on Saturdays. She would get up about 6:00 a.m. and the farmer would pick up both of them at about 7:00 a.m. and they would work until 6:00 p.m. Lena made \$1.50 for the day and Mr. Bonnie made \$2.50 a day for his work. Lena said the younger you were the less you got paid back then.



A lot of things went on with Lena in 1945 at the age of fourteen. Along with the big decision to quit school, she also met a young man that would bring major changes to her life and also turn out to be the love of her life.

Tom Myers Sr. and Lenoir Myers lived in Blounts Creek not too far from Lena and her family. Tom and Lenoir had a son, Tom Jr. They all lived in a small wood frame house about two miles from Lena and her family. Lena had seen Tom around before for years but never had they talked to each other or tried to get to know one another until then. Tom and Lena ran into each other at the local country store, started having conversation with one another and it never ended. Tom was six years older than Lena but this didn't make a difference to her, she was still very interested in Tom and the relationship grew.

Lena said she could remember that Tom came by to visit with her almost everyday. She said she knows he came by the house at least five out of seven days every week. Eventually, Tom was at Lena's house more than he was home. Tom knew to win over Lena he had to win Ms. Classy too.

When he came over he was very nice and polite to Ms. Classy and helped out as much as he could. Tom was a very charming, hard working young man. Lena would still have to do chores and Tom would help her out every time he came over by feeding the chickens and hogs while Lena would pump up the water for the next day.

On most of his visits, Tom would bring Ms. Classy two white handkerchiefs neatly folded and inside a clear plastic bag. Ms. Classy placed the handkerchiefs in an old trunk for safekeeping. One day Lena asked, "Why do you just tuck them away in that trunk?" Ms. Classy said, "One day you will see."

Tom and Lena continued seeing each other for the next couple of years and Tom kept bringing the handkerchiefs and Ms. Classy kept putting them away in the trunk still not telling Lena the reason why. But Lena soon learned they were for a dress that was to be made for her whenever Tom asked her to marry him. The dress would be hand made by Ms. Classy and be worn on Lena's wedding day.

The big day for Tom and Lena to get married came on September 20, 1948. After the marriage Tom and Lena lived with Tom's parents, Tom Sr. and Lenoir who still lived in Blounts Creek as well.

Tom and Lena farm on his parents land. It was not too many acres but just enough for Tom and Lena to get started. Lena thinks it was about five or six acres. She is not completely sure, but when she was working it, it seemed like a lot.

In 1949, Lena gave birth to her and Tom's first child, a little girl named Virgel Mae. July 2nd was a very special day to them. This day started the first of many new additions to come to Tom and Lena's family. Lena said, "After that, the babies kept coming every nine to twelve months." Lena ended up having sixteen children, twelve girls and four boys. They were all single births, not one set of twins.

Tom and Lena's fourth child, a little girl named Emma Lina, was born on March 22, 1953. She was very sick and had gotten pneumonia. She died April 1, 1953, ten days after she was born. The death of this child was very hard on Tom and Lena.

Later, when coming to grips a little better with the death and loss of their little angel, another child was born and this child was another girl. It seemed after this nothing could stop them. Again and again and the babies kept coming. This continued this way until February 1973 when the last baby that Tom and Lena would have was born. It was a girl and she was named Clara Vanessa. Clara weighed seven pounds, eleven ounces. She was a beautiful little girl.

Because the babies had kept coming for so many years, Tom and Lena had many struggles and even with the farm as a source of income, money was tight. The food was grown for eating and other things were grown on the farm to make a living. "Tom was a good provider," Lena said, but even with that, sometimes day-to-day living got hard. She said, "There were so many mouths to feed." At all times, Tom and Lena had a lot to be thankful for with all the children and love that was being shared in their lives. All this is what kept Lena strong when things happened that were not so good.

On December 4, 1974, another tragedy took place; this is the year when the love of Lena's life passed away. Tom died at the age of forty-nine, going to sleep and never to awaken again. This was an immense shock to Lena and her way of life. This made everything she knew and felt to be safe and secure in her life change forever. From that day on Lena had to figure out how she and the children would make it. She said she could only think about how her and her sister had gotten separated when she was a child and promised herself that "will not happen to my children." Lena had three older children that were old enough to go out and get other jobs. These three children got jobs outside the farm.

Virgel, the oldest child, got a job at a sewing factory called Sampson Shirt Factory. Virgel pressed the collars and learned how to fold. Mavis got a job at the National Spinning Company. This was a big yarn plant in Washington that would spin yarn on cones and send them out to different places to make various products. Tom III, the oldest boy, got a job in Chocowinity at

Singer Furniture. This factory made all kinds of household furniture to be shipped out to every location you could imagine.

The children were very used to hard work. This was because they had started working on the farm at eight and nine years of age. Lena said, “Back then in those days that’s how families made a living—with big families.” By teaching the older ones to work they could cut back on the hired help needed on the farm. This was a good thing to teach because the three older children brought enough money in for them to make it for a while.

Just as Lena had thought, many people came in to help saying that they would gladly take some of the younger children. Lena said, “No, but thanks anyway.” While others lent a helping hand on the farm but this did not last very long. The people soon stopped coming to help out and so the money stopped coming and the farm work stopped getting done.

Lena saw that she could no longer stay at home and try to run that farm by herself because if she did, she would lose everything that she and Tom had worked so hard for.

This discussion led Lena to feel she needed to get a job. In the early 1980s, because Lena had quit school she knew getting job would be harder for her. Lena ended up getting a job at a crab house in Chocowinity, NC. She became what is known as a crab picker. Being a crab picker placed Lena at a table where a lot of steamed crabs would be poured out for removal of the meat inside them. She would have to pick the meat from the crab’s body without getting the outside shell in the meat. The crabmeat was placed in clear plastic cups and the meat was weighed out at the end of the day. That was how Lena got paid—and the money was coming in. Lena really grew to like this job a lot. She made \$150.00 to \$220.00 a week picking crabs. She said, “I learned to pick crabs very quickly because I had a lot of hungry mouths to feed.”

Lena worked at the crab house for the next ten years until it closed down in the early 1990s. By this time all the children were adults except the baby girl, Clara Vanessa. She was a junior in high school.

Once again, the children helped out with the living expenses of Lena’s home. She was out of a job and her unemployment was a very small amount. Lena said, “It was better than nothing.” She would be all right.

In 1993, a great and memorable piece of news came to Lena. Someone had run an ad in the *Washington Daily News* stating that they were looking for an Aunt whose name was Lena Howard and that she had lived in Blounts Creek, NC, and had a sister by the name of Hattie

Louise. The person that had put this article in the newspaper was Hattie's daughter, Debra Stuckey and she was trying to find her mother's family.

One of Lena's daughters, Verna, made the contact with Debra and set up a meeting for herself and Lena. Lena was more than thrilled about this meeting; she was about to learn more about her roots through one of her sisters' children and also what may have happened to her sister. Lena found out that her sister had given birth to fourteen children but was saddened to find out that Hattie had given them all away and not raised any of them.

According to Debra, her sisters and brothers were put in foster care and had remained there to be raised. In August 2010 Lena was blessed and met a nephew. In Debra's search for family members, she found one of her siblings, a brother, and she brought him to Chocowinity to meet their Aunt Lena. Debra and her brother loved the fact they had met their Aunt Lena. Debra says it helps her to feel closer to her mother. "Reunions like this one with family brings back memories," Lena says.

Lena often remembers and talks about her husband Tom and how when he was a young man that the men drank what they called moonshine. It was homemade liquor made from corn with other added things. He also drank some Budweiser beer. She said, "Nowadays these young men drink Natural Light Beer." She also said that her husband Tom didn't like for her to drink, so she only did it when he couldn't find out. She said that was the fun part.

In 1996, Lena had to go through another tragedy when Ms. Classy died, the lady that had taken her in and raised her like her own. Ms. Classy died March 14, 1996, after a long sickness. Lena had a hard time with this death but with the help of her children and God she made it through. She pulled herself together and life was back on track again. She made sure she put in regular visits to Pardner and supported her.

Lena attended church and a lot of family functions. This is where a lot of her time was spent. When Lena got older she said she started going to church every Sunday morning and liked it very much and looks back now to when she was a child and did not understand why it was so important to Pardner and Mother Clara why she should attend. Now she understands the concept of it better and looks forward to going.

At this time Lena holds a mother's position at church, which is one of the higher positions in a church congregation. Lena attends Clay Bottom Missionary Baptist Church. This church is in Chocowinity on Old Clay Bottom School Road. The roots of her church upbringing have not

changed since she was a child and she instills in her children and grandchildren the importance of church and having a church family. Lena said, “Believe it or not, Clay Bottom is the same church I attended when I was a little girl. The love was strong in the church family then and still is today.”

In 1998, Pardner died. With tears in her eyes, Lena said, “I really did not think I would make it through her death.” Lena said that it seemed like every time she started to get herself together some more bad things happened and someone she loved died. Again her church family stepped in along with a lot of other people talking to her and telling her that this is how life was supposed to be, that it might not feel good this minute, but it would pass. She said, “You are right, but that is not what I want to hear.”



Lena at 79

It took Lena a while to get over this not having much to say to anyone, just living day to day life and taking it as it comes. She was very sad for a long time. Lena’s family stuck by her and kept telling her it would all be okay.

Lena was blessed with a lot of grandchildren. She attended birthday parties and family outings with them. This helped to keep her busy most of the time. Lena’s family is a big part of her day-to-day life. Going to the market, church and basketball games at the school keep her so busy that life is really going good for her.

September 24, 2010 marked Lena’s 79th birthday. Once again she got to see her long lost niece and a lot of other family members. Family is a very important thing to Lena and keeping it together as well as socializing with each one of them. Lena says often she just thinks of an old gospel song that goes somewhat like this: “When I look back over my life, and I think things over, I can truly say that I’ve been blessed, I have a testimony.” She says, “That is my song, that is

my life. I am blessed and can still talk about everything that has happened, and now I'm okay with it.

I know a lot of times in our lives we don't think we are going to make it with all the things that happen to us. I always try to remember that God will not put anything on us that we can't bare. I do realize that the odds were stacked against me in the beginning, but I made it. I'm okay."

Pictured below are four generations that originated from Lena. Lena and her first born Virgel, Virgel's daughter, Catrena, Catrena's daughters, Sylida and Montrena. A family of beautiful and loving relatives held together by Lena's love.



Catrena Ross-Keys, Lena Howard Myers, Virgel Ross, Montrena and Sylida Carter

James Enoch Smith III

the center of our family

TERRI MENKE

This is the story about the man at the center of our large family. It's about the man that loves to hear his family get together, laugh, and share stories. He is loved and respected. If anyone in the family needs advice or help, he will be sure to be there for us. You will never meet a man who is more dedicated to his family than James Enoch Smith III.



My grandfather, James Enoch Smith III, was born in the summer of 1936 in Beaufort County. His parents were Virginia Whitaker and James Enoch Smith II. James' father was called Enoch, so James got the nickname "Enky Boy." When James was seven months old, his mother got up one morning to start the wood stove. She was in a rush, because she over slept. She poured kerosene on the wood, pouring too much. When she lit it, the stove exploded burning her and catching the house on fire.

A "large colored man" was passing by and noticed the fire. He ran into the house pulling Virginia out. She kept saying "the baby." He ran back in the house and found James and carried him to safety. Virginia

died two weeks later from injuries sustained in the fire.

James' dad was out of town at the time of the accident. James' Aunt Hattie Woolard and Uncle Joe Woolard cared for him until James' dad returned. After awhile James' father wanted to get remarried and move away, but Aunt Hattie had become very attached to little James. He had a lot of health problems and was small for his age, so his father said that she could raise him. He



Baby James with Joe Woolard

knew that she loved him very much, and he couldn't give him any better. James has called Joe and Hattie, mom and dad, ever since. James' father remarried to a woman named Naomi, and they had four boys and a little girl together.

Joe, Hattie, and James moved to "the farm" in August of 1940. James was only four years old. They paid \$600 for the 25 acres of land. The farm was on the outside of the city limits back then, and James said that it was "back in the bammers," down a dirt road, and secluded.

Joe and Hattie owned the land and hired tenant farmers to tend the tobacco crops. Most tenant farmer families were very large, and their children would help them in the fields. The families would only stay for about a year or two before moving on to a different farm.

James recalled that his dad would pay him and some of his friends to walk down each row of tobacco with a tin can and pick the worms off each plant. "I was sure happy when they came out with DDT. I didn't have to hand pick those worms anymore." DDT is a pesticide that is now banned because of its environmental impact.

Growing up, James didn't have the luxuries that we have today. James recalled that every Monday his mother, Hattie, would boil the clothes in a large cast iron wash pot using a large wooden paddle to stir them around. Once the clothes were washed, she would use a washboard to scrub them. Then, she would put the clothes into another pot with "bluing" to make the clothes white. Once the clothes were washed and dried she would starch them and iron them with a gas iron. They had to get their water from a "pitch pump" (hand pump) in the yard. In 1945, Hattie got a gas powered ringer for the clothes. If you weren't careful when you put the clothes in it would "take your hand and arm with them."

His mother would clean the house twice a year with "house scalding." She would take boiling water from the large wash pot outside, bring it inside the house and just throw it on the walls. She would then mop the walls and let the water run down and then mop the floors. You could

His mother would clean the house twice a year with "house scalding." She would take boiling water from the large wash pot outside, bring it inside the house and just throw it on the walls.

only do this with wood walls and floors. This got all the bugs and dirt out of the house, but James said it didn't really matter because you left your windows open during the summer and the bugs just came right back in.

They had a wood stove for all the cooking. James' mother was very picky about the type of wood the boys would bring her to cook with. The oven had to be a certain temperature to cook her biscuits and not all woods would get hot enough. It was James' job after school to come home and chop wood and collect kindling for the next day.

When they needed a bath, which was usually once a week, they would use a foot bath. It was a small tub only big enough for your foot to fit in. They would fill it with water from the pitch pump outside and then carry it inside behind the wood stove so they could stay warm while bathing. They had an outhouse for a bathroom and they had "slop pots" in the house at night so you didn't have to go outside. In the mornings they would "turn out the slop pots."

Along with not having indoor plumbing, they didn't have the modern convenience of refrigerators. They had an ice box in the house, which was just a box that held a large cube of ice. James' father would bring a 25 pound chunk of ice home with him after work. If you wanted ice for a drink then you would have to chip pieces off the large block with a pick. James remembers that he and a couple of his friends would chase the ice trucks after they got out of school, waiting for small chips of ice to fall out of the back of the truck so they could munch on them.

Back then, their ice box was smaller than the large refrigerators that we have now. Meat had to be dried, salted, or smoked to keep it from going bad. They weren't able to go to the store back then like we do now. Most of their fruits and vegetables were grown in their garden. They grew corn, string beans, squash, cabbage, collards, potatoes, sweet potatoes, and field peas. They also had fruit trees in their yard. The collards and field peas were most important because they grew all year round. James said that "everyone back then owned a garden." "A family could survive off of \$10 a week back then." The only things that they had to buy were flour and salt.

Even though James helped out so much at home he still went to school. James started the first grade in 1942, at John Small School here in Washington. During first grade he was sick a lot. He had the mumps, measles, whooping cough, tuberculosis, his tonsils removed, and “a touch of malaria.” He had malaria flair ups all the way through college. He was put on Quinine to help prevent future flair ups. He said that he stopped taking it as soon as he was out of the house. “It tasted awful. I’d rather be laid out with malaria for a few days than take that stuff.”

James didn’t get to go to the doctor very often. The other times he was sick his mother would take him to the pharmacy and just take whatever concoction the pharmacist gave them. Once he finished first grade he never missed another day of school. He had eleven years of perfect attendances.

In second grade, he got his first pair of glasses. He remembers going to the doctor’s office to pick up his new glasses. The doctor walked him to the corner of the street before giving him the glasses and asked James if he could see the couple walking down the sidewalk. James said that he couldn’t. The doctor handed James his glasses and then asked again. James then said that he could. The doctor then asked James if he saw that fish jump out of the water in the river. James said “No sir. I didn’t see that.” The doctor puts his hand on James’ shoulder and said “Good, I didn’t either.”



Even with poor vision, he wanted to join the school band, but his parents couldn’t afford to buy him an instrument. The fifth grade band director said that he had an e-flat clarinet left over from a previous band he played in and that James could use it as long as he wanted. So in fifth grade, he joined the band with his new e-flat clarinet. He continued to play in the band at old Washington High School. He was the only one with an e-flat clarinet during all his years in the band. He was still pretty small for his age in high school. His band teacher would take two Sears catalogues and stack them together, stick them in a pillow case, and put them on James’ seat so he could see the sheet music.

In the tenth grade, he met my grandmother, Joyce Evelyn Tyson, when she was 13 years old and James was 15. The first time he saw her, he and his friend were “cutting through her yard” to get to the creek behind her house. She was on her front porch and he thought “God she is a pretty thing. Her hair was so black, it glistened red in the sunlight”. He never dated another girl after meeting Joyce.

Shortly after that he asked her to go with him to church, but Joyce’s mom wouldn’t let her go. James was very persistent and just kept asking until her mother relented. He would take her to church every Sunday, Wednesday night, and to any other church event, as an excuse to spend time with her. He would pick her up in his ’49 Ford pickup with a small vase of flowers in the ashtray. Joyce taught James sign language so they could talk during church.

His senior year, he was fourth at the top of his class. The top-ten seniors were called “Marshalls.” He also got the science award for the best grades in science. When he graduated in 1954 at the age of 17, he was 5’ 4” and 125 lbs.

After graduation, he tried to join the Air Force. When he applied, he had to take a physical. After the physical, the Air Force recruiter said, “We can handle your weight, anemia, and malaria, but we can’t handle your eyes. I won’t want to be anywhere near you with a gun in your hand at night.” They wouldn’t let him join, so he decided to go to college.

He started East Carolina Teachers College (East Carolina University now) that fall, majoring in Business Administration, with a minor in Liberal Arts. While attending college, he also helped tend tobacco at home in the fall and spring. During the winter months he would stay in a dorm on campus. While he was taking his first college exam he had a temperature of 104 degrees. After finishing the exam the teacher called his dad to come get him, because he passed out. It turned out that he had another malaria flair up.

James always knew that he was going to marry Joyce and he would tell her all the time. He didn’t officially propose until the first quarter of his freshmen year in college. James saved his money for several months to be able to buy Joyce’s engagement ring. He picked out a lose diamond that had a little flaw in it that reminded him of Joyce, but he has never told anyone why that flaw reminded him of Joyce, not even her. Once he had the perfect diamond for her he had it placed in a setting.

He married Joyce his junior year of college on November 20, 1956, at Cherry Chapel (now Rosedale) here in Washington. She was 18 years old. James’ mother had to sign for him to get

married. Back then girls were allowed to get married at 18, but the boys couldn't get married until they were 21. On their honeymoon they ran out of money. They were on their way to the mountains of North Carolina and got lost and ended up in Dunn. Then they had car trouble and had to get antifreeze for the car when they got to the mountains, because it was cold and snowing. They ran out of gas on the way to James' parent's house where they had a small apartment upstairs. They had to use Joyce's last five dollars to get the rest of the way home.



Their apartment was only two rooms. One room was a bedroom and the other was a kitchenette. They didn't start out together with a lot of things. They bought their first used black-and-white TV for \$20 shortly after moving into the apartment. The TV would shock them when they tried to turn it on. They had to unplug the TV first. Then they had to take pliers to turn the knob and then plug it back in. If they didn't do that "it would knock you wangered." Some of their favorite programs were, "Have Gun will Travel," "Raw Hide," "The Ed Sullivan Show," and "The Arthur Smith Show."

They found out around Christmas that Joyce was pregnant. Bambi Joe Smith was born September 5, 1957. Joyce was in the hospital for five days. The doctor told James that it would cost \$300 for the birth. When the bill came it was \$337.50. He was able to pay the extra \$37.50 off a little each month. After Bambi was born they moved from the little apartment to "the cinder block house," which was also on "the farm."

James took a job sweeping floors at night at the Washington Garment Company after his marriage. He was paid about \$20 a week. Whenever he would find a scrap of fabric or button on the floor, he would bring it home for Joyce to make clothes. Joyce also made clothes out of feed sacks for the kids. Bambi (my mom) can remember that the sacks had pretty patterns on them, such as tiny flowers, and Joyce would make dresses out of them for the girls.

James stopped working at the Washington Garment Company after he graduated college in 1958 and went into business for himself doing construction. He sold his '57 Mercury to buy his first dump truck. That was their only transportation for awhile, so when they had to get groceries or run errands in town, James, Joyce, and Bambi would load up in the cab of the dump truck. Over time he managed to buy three more dump trucks, two front-end-loaders, a drag line, and a few crawlers. He also had three employees. All of them named one of the pieces of construction equipment after their wives. When it came time to buy new equipment they couldn't afford the new hydraulic ones.

James and Joyce had three other children. On August 8, 1961, Mandy Joyce Smith was born. Then in the spring of 1963, Joyce gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. James Enoch Smith IV (Jimmy) was born a few minutes before Virginia Dee Smith (Ginger). They were named after James' parents. Jimmy died June 20, 1987. James and Joyce were still living in "the cinder block house" at the time of the twins' birth. There were only two bedrooms. Bambi and Mandy shared one room and babies Ginger and Jimmy, would sleep in makeshift cribs made from the dresser drawers in James and Joyce's room. (Fig. 10) (Caption: James with his children, Bambi, Mandy, Jimmy, and Ginger)



James with Bambi, Mandy, Jimmy, & Ginger

As the kids grew, Joyce had them help her raise all kinds of animals on "the farm." First they tried their hand at raising turkeys. Someone gave them some turkey chicks to raise with the purpose of killing and eating once they were full grown, but Joyce and Bambi became very attached to them. One of the turkeys was named "Old Tom." He was white and weighed about 35 pounds and would wear a ribbon with a bell around his neck. He would walk Bambi to the bus stop at the end of the driveway in the morning and wait for her to come home in the afternoons. On the

weekends if she wasn't up by a certain time, "Old Tom" would go peck at her window waking her up. Bambi's room was in the basement of their new house. They had moved to a three bedroom brick house, about 200 yards from the "cinder block house" still on "the farm," that had a full basement, shortly after the twins were born.

After that, they bought nine calves from a dairy farmer, who didn't want the calves drinking the dairy cows' milk. They were only a few days old when they got them and Joyce would hand feed them. Each of the kids got to name one of the cows. The cows would follow Joyce all over the place. One night the cows got out and Joyce had to beat on the milk bucket to get them to come back. They kept the cows for a year, but then they had to sell them and Joyce cried.

They also raised chickens so they could sell the eggs, but James said, "I couldn't sell them darn eggs." No one would buy them. They had more eggs than they could eat. They would put five to six eggs in one pie. It got so that James would give each child a penny for each egg that they would eat.

Even with all the working and taking care of different animals, James would make time to spend with his family. He loved to take short trips whenever he could. If he had an extra \$25 he would come home and tell Joyce "pack the kids up and let's go." They would go with no real destination planned. They would just pick a road and drive. James loved the mountains of North Carolina. They would go for the weekend, stopping at interesting places along the way. James smiled as he told me, "It wasn't the destination that mattered as much as the trip getting there." One of his favorite places to drive through was Chimney Rock. He said that it was nine miles of beautiful scenery on Highway 64. "You could be driving on top of the mountain and see everything below you."

James and Joyce have been to over 15 different states together. One trip James and Joyce flew to Las Vegas with two other family members. They had already made reservations at the hotel, but when they got there the hotel had given their room to Dolly Parton. That hotel sent them to the Sands hotel. They said that the room was very nice with a huge round bed and gold plated sink fixtures. Every time that James and Joyce recalled an old memory of one of their many trips they would laugh at all the things that happened.

For a few years James had to cut back on their family trips because one of his daughters developed scoliosis. When Mandy was twelve, she was admitted to Children's Orthopedic Hospital in Gastonia, NC, for scoliosis from May to September 1973. The doctors said that her

back was shaped like a question mark. She had surgery and was placed in a plaster of paris full body cast that ran from her hips to the top of her head.

James and the rest of the family couldn't stay with her every day, because James had to work during the week. Every Friday night they would drive to Gastonia and stay in Honey's Motel through the weekend. Mandy always asked them to bring her Slim Jims, potato chips, and sour pickles.

After September, she was allowed to go home, but she had to stay in the cast for another year. Joyce made a cushion for Mandy to kneel on because she couldn't sit. Even though Mandy was in a body cast and couldn't attend school her classmates would carry an intercom around with them from class to class so Mandy could listen to her classes. Through all of this she still managed to be first in her class.

Meanwhile, during this extremely busy time in his life, with Mandy's hospitalization and with working in construction, James found time to fill out tax returns from home too. Then one day his friend from high school, Jack Cherry, told James that he was starting Beaufort County Community College and wanted to know if he would be interested in teaching some night classes. James agreed, and taught economics, computers, math, and accounting on and off for six years. So James "would haul dirt in the morning, put on a suit and file tax returns during the day, and then teach classes at night." Joyce called him "a jack of all trades."

One day he came home and told Joyce that he wanted to "quit the dirt business." James gave his dad, Joe, a front-end-loader and a dump truck and helped Joe and Hattie build a new house in exchange for property across the street. He decided to use his college education and go into accounting.

They rented a small place in town for \$35 a month for the building and \$35 a month for the parking lot, as an accounting office. Joyce came into the office one day and told James that the dentist was selling his office down on Second Street. James said "let's go look." They bought it for \$20,000. The pipes were still coming up out of the floor where the dentist chairs use to be. They had to use their desks to cover them so the clients wouldn't see them. After a year they had earned enough money to remodel the downstairs. He and Joyce worked at that office together for 25 years, but because of vision problems he had to quit.

In the late 80s, he discovered that he had Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP). RP is an inherited disease where the light sensitive retina of the eye gradually deteriorates, which leads to total blindness.

Since James' mother died when she was young, he doesn't know if she had RP and there was no one else in his family that had it.

James' vision gradually worsened. Back then he had what was called "Gun Barrel" vision, now it is called tunnel vision. He couldn't see very well at night so his license was restricted to daylight use only. In 1993, he was sitting in his house looking at his hands and then all of a sudden his hands weren't there. He could no longer see them or see enough to fill out tax returns or use a calculator. He sold his business to his youngest daughter, Ginger. Joyce helped Ginger run the business for another four to five years, before Joyce retired with James. Ginger still runs her accounting business today.

After James lost his sight and stopped working he stayed home and took care of the house while Joyce helped Ginger. "I became a house husband." He learned to cook and clean, and figured out how to mow the yard even though he couldn't see. He would take two cinder blocks and put one at each end of the yard and then run a rope between them. Using the rope as a guide he would pull the mower behind him. He said that he would always miss a spot in the middle because the rope would bow and he wouldn't be going straight. He also used to trim the low branches off the pine trees behind their house. He would feel his way tree to tree and then cut whatever branches he could reach. Joyce made him quit because one day he cut the head off a snake that he didn't even know was there.

James picked up a few new hobbies as well as doing housework. He took a few guitar lessons, but taught himself the rest. He also taught himself to play the banjo. He wrote nine songs and made a CD of himself playing the guitar and gave it to everyone in the family. Another year, he wrote a book of all the phrases and sayings that he "Heard in Passing." That was another gift to everyone in the family. He started another book, but it became too difficult, so he had to stop. He listens to books on tape all the time. He has "read" about 4,000 books. He tries to read the Bible at least twice a year. His favorite entertainment author is Rex Stout. Rex Stout is a mystery and crime writer.

Five years ago he and Joyce found a stray puppy roaming around "the farm." James and Joyce never had a dog before so they decided to keep her. They named her Annie. She is an all black Australian shepherd mix. She takes up a lot of James's time now. She is extremely spoiled. Every morning James and Annie go for a two to three mile walk down the road and back.

Most of our family lives on “the farm.” Shortly after Bambi married Allen Edwards in 1975 she moved to “the farm,” and had my older brother, Trevor, and me, but in the summer of 1991 our family moved to New Bern.



Mandy married Phil Jones in 1980, moved to “the farm,” and raised their two girls, Lindsay and Cassie, there. Ginger did the same, marrying Jeffery Spain in 1982, and raising their two girls, Melissa and Kayla, there as well. All the girls are now grown and living in their own homes on “the farm.”

I moved back in 2005. I am living in the house that I grew up in, with my husband and three kids. My older brother still lives in New Bern with his three kids, but talks constantly about moving back. My mom,

Bambi, is also talking about moving back.

James is now trying to figure out how to add more houses to “the farm.” He wants to make sure there is enough room for our growing families. James has six grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren, and he loves having all his family living close to him. In the summer he can sit on his porch and hear the kids playing outside.

I see my grandfather at least once a week. I can just walk across a dirt road, and I’m at his back door. It is common to find me or any other member of the family sitting with James and Joyce, on their glassed-in porch. The kids will be playing on the floor with the many toys that Joyce picks up from her weekly yard sale trips, while James tells you tales of “the old days.” When you are there, you always feel welcome and comfortable. If you ever needed anything, then James and Joyce would be the first ones to offer their help.

Johnnie Smallwood, Sr.

BERNADETTE SMALLWOOD



Johnnie

"I grew up a dirt farmer's son and retired a dirt farmer's son. Never got rich and didn't want to be. My childhood stomping ground is now concrete, stores and houses. I remember the good times and the bad. It was not the money we made but how to stretch that money to the last dime. It was not the wind, rain or snow. It was about the love that flow. It was not the hot sunshine nor the clouds that hung low. It was the grace of GOD that help us swang that hoe."

Johnnie Smallwood Sr. was born in 1934, in Windsor, NC, to Ervin and Odell Smallwood. He was born and grew up in a three-room wood framed house. There were three bedrooms in one building and

a kitchen and dining room in another building. The house had no running water, no bathroom, and no electricity. They used an outhouse that was about twenty feet away from the living quarters. He had three sisters and a brother: Cora, Gora, Annie, and Robert Turner. All children were born at home by a midwife. Back then in the small town of Windsor, there was no hospital to go to have a baby. Most families did not have enough money to call a doctor unless the child was seriously ill.

Johnnie's childhood was void of luxuries, but full of country pleasures. He grew up with his father sharecropping in Indian Woods and his mother was a stay at home mom. All of the food that their family ate was grown and raised on the family's farm. Even the eggs that were used for cooking were laid by hens that were tended to by the children. All water used for cooking, drinking, bathing and washing clothes was pumped from a well in back of the house. Any hot

water needed for cooking or bathing was boiled on a potbelly stove in the kitchen. There was a wood-burning stove that was use to heat the three-room house on cold winter days. Johnnie often spoke about the piles of wood stacked at least three feet high behind the house. “It was everyone’s responsibility to chop wood to keep fire in the stove year round.” Everyone had their chores around the house and they knew that they had to be done before they went to school.

His father grew corn, peanuts and cotton. It was never an easy task, says Johnnie with a big smile but, “my father was the best farmer in Bertie County.” Being a good farmer was necessary to survive in the thirties and forties. Unlike our generation, there were no fancy tools, it was all manual labor.

As a young boy, he remembers his father teaching the family how important it was to nurture the soil for the crop to grow. Johnnie’s father made sure he showed him how to turn the soil regularly to keep the water and nutrients flowing throughout the soil. His father took him and his sisters to his sharecropping farm and their family farm daily to ensure they would be knowledgeable of farm life. He says, “those were life lessons that I used to tend to my own farm when I grew up.” Farming was very hard work back when Johnnie was growing up and he says that there was little time for anything else.

There was one other thing that Johnnie remembered having time for when he was growing up and that was playing baseball. When Johnnie was just a boy his father gathered all of the young boys and men from around the neighborhood. They got together and cut down a large field that was growing beside their house. In just a week, that field that was grown up with weeds and shrubbery was completely transformed into a baseball field. The boys used to play hours of baseball every Saturday after they did their chores and every Sunday after church. Johnnie described this as the best days of his life. He said that he and his cousins would get together and play all afternoon until their parents called them for dinner. He said there were some weekends that he felt like he could have even slept on the baseball field.

Weekdays were a different story. His mother and father woke up at the “crack of dawn” to get them ready for school. Johnnie’s mother and father never finished school, so school was a priority in their home. He started school when he was six years old as a first grader. He went to school in a one room school house with other students ranging from six years old to thirteen years old. He remembers his teacher was a middle-age black woman with long thick black hair. She was very nice, but she was also strict.



Johnnie's Mother & Father

Johnnie says before class started his teacher always made them stand up and repeat the Pledge of Allegiance and the Lord's Prayer. Everyday his teacher would make all the students repeat out loud as a class "school is for learning and recess is for playing." This was her way of making sure they knew that there was to be no playing around when they were in the building. Johnnie's favorite memories throughout his school years were when his teacher asked him to do special tasks throughout the day. He was her helper on some days. She would ask him to pass out materials or sweep the floor. Johnnie said "no child would want to do that nowadays, but back then when the teacher asked you to do something, you felt honored."

Johnnie graduated from W.S. Etheridge High School in 1953. At the time, this was an all black school with students who walked for miles to attend. Luckily Johnnie did not have to walk more than a mile to school. On Johnnie's graduation day, his family had a celebration for him and his cousins. His family was so proud of him for accomplishing something that they had not. He remembers his father telling him on graduation day, "now you can go further than I ever did, son." Johnnie said that was a special moment for him and his father. That Sunday after the graduation, the church held a reception after church for all of the graduates. This made him feel even more special.

Sundays were the most important day of the week for Johnnie and his family. It was "church" day and everything revolved around church that day. Johnnie and his siblings would wake up early enough to be at Sunday school at 9:00 AM. Then they would attend the church service with the adults until whenever the service ended that day. Johnnie never liked going to church that much. He said that it was just too long for him to sit through. During the adult service he often got in trouble because he kept moving too much. Johnnie said, in his defense, "nobody in their right mind could stay still that long." The one thing that he did like about going to church on Sundays was when the church would cook a meal and serve it to the congregation. Johnnie said he like

having everyone around and being able to eat and play.

Holidays were full of family food and fun. Thanksgiving was always a feast. The dinner table was full of crops that the families grew. They had cured ham from the smoke house and a turkey that they plucked themselves. Christmas was always a festive time of year. Johnnie's father would drive his truck into the woods to find the perfect Christmas tree for the family. He would love to ride with his dad to help him chop the tree down. Johnnie said he could not wait to get home to help his dad set the tree up in the house because he loved how the aroma of the pine tree could be smell throughout the house. Johnnie's mom made colorful decorations for the tree and gifts for the family. She also made hand stitch quilts that she gave as Christmas gifts. Money was not plentiful, says Johnnie. They got only one small present wrapped under the tree which was always a doll for the girls or a truck or car for the boys. The children also got a Christmas stocking full of Christmas candy and fruit. The table was adorned with plenty of food and fruits and nuts. The family home smelled of cakes, pies and Christmas sugar cookies for the children.

Johnnie remembered missing those holiday dinners when he was drafted into the war in 1953. He was sent to Fort Jackson for basic training. There he trained long and hard to fight for his country. He was then sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky, where he received word that his duty station would be in Korea. Not long after that assignment, the Korean War was called off and Johnnie was sent back home. Johnnie said that that was another one of the happiest times of his life. He said that he was ready to get home and see his family.

Johnnie said that he remembers meeting Melva Jean at a store in Lewiston. They made eye contact and Johnnie "thought she was the prettiest thing he had ever seen." They started courting and not long after he asked her to marry him and she said yes. In 1963, Johnnie married Melva Jean Bush from Lewiston, NC. They had a small wedding in her hometown. There were about fifty guests and they were all family. Her family cooked the food for the reception that was held

He would love to ride with his dad to help him chop the tree down. Johnnie said he could not wait to get home to help his dad set the tree up in the house because he loved how the aroma of the pine tree could be smell throughout the house.

at the church. He said that he remembers their first dance and their wedding night. Not long after the wedding they moved in their house together and started having children.

They had four children that they raised in Windsor, NC. Johnnie Jr. is the eldest, Ervin is the second eldest, Wayne is the third child, and Patricia is the youngest. He said that he was so excited when they had their first child. He said that they spoiled him until the others came along.

Johnnie said when he became a father he incorporated the same family values and work ethnics into his own family that his father taught him. Johnnie said that he can remember making his children do chores from a young age. He said, "I didn't want my kids growing up not knowing



how to do nothin'." They had to wash dishes, help on the farm, clean the house, and anything else their parents asked them to do. If they didn't do their chores, then they knew they were going to get a "whooping." Johnnie said that he usually never had a problem because they knew he was serious. The kids had to help out around the house because they "helped mess up."

Johnnie worked two jobs to support his family. He tended to 20 acres of farm land that had corn, beans, and peanuts in the daytime, and he worked as a custodian for the school system in the evening. He did that from 1970 until 1985. After that he decided to stop farming and worked full-time as a custodian in the schools. He did things like paint the schools in the summer, did major repairs, and general cleaning. "All of that was so that my kids could have better than what I had," he said.

One of Johnnie's favorite memories from when his children were growing up was when he took his children on nature walks. He took his children in the woods to pick up pine cones, wood and to enjoy the scenery. He wanted his children to "learn the land." He said that the kids would bring things back and make up games to play with the wood and pine cones.

Another memory Johnnie has from when his children were growing up was when he took his family to the beach. It was everyone's first time at the beach and he said they had a great time. On the way to the beach, the kids were so excited that they could hardly sit still. To prepare for the trip everyone packed their lunches and made sure to take extra clothes. At the beach the kids made sand castles and played in the water. Johnnie says that he remembers Melva Jean not letting the kids go too far out in the water because she was afraid they would get swept away by the current.

Out of all of the memories that Johnnie has with his family, his favorite are the ones about the annual family reunions. The Smallwoods are a large family in eastern NC so you can only imagine how large the family reunions are. Johnnie said that they were always held at a Church or someone's house. He said that the food was the best. He would always provide the pig to roast. All of the women would be in the kitchen cooking the potato salad, green beans, baked beans, macaroni and cheese, deviled eggs and collard greens. The men would roast the pigs and gather around the table to play card games like spades and black jack. The kids would run around playing kickball, baseball, or football. "As it got dark, the mosquitoes would attack our legs but we didn't care because we were having fun and we only got together once a year."

Johnnie said that he knew he was getting old when his first born, Johnnie Jr., went to prom. He says that his son took a nice looking lady to the prom. He took them to the school and dropped



them off at the front door and he said that is when he knew his kids were growing up and about to leave home. Johnnie's children graduated from high school and went off to live their own lives. One of his sons went into the military, the other two went to college, and his daughter became a nurse. Johnnie said it was so lonely when they left. He and his wife Melva Jean decided to do more things for themselves. They went on more dates and took trips to see their children. Johnnie said they mostly just enjoyed not being bothered every minute of the day. They had more time for each other. Johnnie still worked, but he

knew that he would soon retire.

Not long after his third child left home to attend college, Johnnie's wife Melva Jean died from a massive heart attack. This was in 1989, only one year after his third grandchild was born. Melva's death was very traumatic for Johnnie because he depended on her for so much. They had a set routine for every day of the week. She cooked him breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day.



She did his laundry, and even helped him get ready for work in the morning. When Johnnie was asked about her death, he said that he felt like he "lost a part of himself because she was his best friend." After her death, Johnnie said that he went back to work not long after. "I couldn't just sit around our house; it would only make it worse. Keeping myself busy was the only thing I knew to do."

Johnnie kept himself busy by continuing to work. He continued to farm and work as a custodian in the school system. In 2001, Johnnie retired from the school

system as the lead custodian. He still could not sit still. He had to keep himself busy so he started to volunteer at his church with his older sister. Three days out of the week he and his sister delivered meals-on-wheels for the elderly in the community for the church. He also volunteered as a church van driver. On Sunday mornings, he used the church van to drive around the community and pick up the elderly so that they could attend church. He said that he did that until his eyes started to go bad.

It took Johnnie years to talk about Melva and her death. He said he just didn't want to feel the pain again so he didn't talk about her to anyone. About ten years after her death, Johnnie said he spoke about her at a family reunion. Johnnie said at the reunion they were honoring the lives of the dead in the family, and they asked him to speak on her behalf. He said that was the first time he spoke of her since her death, but he could not say more than a few sentences before he got "choked up." Johnnie said, "It was always easier to talk about her after the family reunion."

Johnnie was also able to make it through her death by being involved with his grandchildren. He would take them and pick them up from school, take them to sports practices, and spend the weekends with them when their parents needed a break. He said, "I like them youngins. They always had me on the go." All but two of Johnnie's grandchildren are adults now. He said, "They grew up so fast." He recently attended one of his grandchildren's high school graduation and another's college graduation. "I am proud of my grandchildren," said Johnnie. "I want them to make it a lot further than I did."

Now Johnnie, retired from working and no longer volunteering since his sister died, simply strolls through his day enjoying life. He still lives independently. Johnnie usually gets up early and eats breakfast, visits his sister and brother, visits his daughter, visits a few friends and returns home to do it all over again the next morning. Johnnie said with a grin, "I enjoy not having anything to do. I should've started this earlier."


Johnnie and his brother have become even closer since both of them have stopped working. His brother lives right next door to him. They both live in the same house that the raised their families in. Now they spend almost every day together. Johnnie's brother is younger than him so he does a lot of the driving. But nevertheless, they can be spotted out together every day. Johnnie said, "I take the time to enjoy my days now since you never know when your days will end."

Although Johnnie's life was full of hard work, he is proud of all of his accomplishments in his life. "There are a few things I would change about the choices I made in my life, but I think I turned out pretty good." Johnnie took a deep breath and said, "I'm glad I got to tell my story. Nobody wants to hear about things that happened back in the good old days anymore." Johnnie is seventy-seven years old and he said that he "has a lot more livin' to do." Growing up in the thirties and forties may not have been easy for Johnnie, but he made the best of it and he enjoyed every bit of it.

Edith Burton

small-town southern belle

RYAN HOWARD

 *On a cold December 8th 1944, Bonnie and Mike Burton welcomed a baby girl into their lives. They named her Edith Burton. Her dad did not want her to have a middle name because he did not have a middle name. She was delivered by Dr. Hayes, who came and stayed at their house until she was born. Prior to her birth, her mother had two children that did not survive birth, so Edith was the miracle baby.*

“My mother was nervous and she asked if I would make it,” the doctor replied saying, “this one looks like a fighter. It will take quick lightning on a freight train to get her.” She was sure that he was saying this just to keep them calm. The reason she was born before the baby boom was because her grandmother pleaded with the draft board to spare her son because she was a widow and had no one else to tend to their farm.

She grew up in a small farm house in Chinquapin, NC, in Duplin County. They lived in one bedroom and the rest of the house is where her grandmother Beulah Burton lived. “She was a tyrant of sorts as I recall,” says Edith.

The one room in her house is where her, her parents, and her two sisters all slept and lived. She remembers the first time she ate hamburger as being one of the best meals she had until then and it was cooked on the wood heater by her father. Most of her happiest memories are from the period up until her father’s death in a car accident with a drunk driver when she was five years old. “He had promised to pick me up on his way home from work and take me to the store as a reward for being a good girl. I still do not know why he forgot to pick me up that day.”

After the death of her father, her mother and two sisters, Joyce and Jo, moved in with her maternal grandparents. “I remember when they first got electricity which consisted of a front porch light and one light in all four of the rooms.” They did not have a bathroom, they had a pot that needed to be emptied every morning. At other times during the day they had an outhouse to use. “One of my memories from here was that my grandfather did not share and had a separate outhouse and one time my cousin had come over to visit and was messing in the outhouse when

he fell in and had to be rescued.” The house did not have a shower so to do that they used “bird baths” on the outside pump to wash up.

Her Aunt Martha and cousins lived just down the road. She and her oldest sister would walk down to visit and play with the kids. They played cowboys and Indians and made mountains of mud pies. “Having few toys, we were left at the hands of our imaginations. On one visit, me and my cousin got mad at my sister so we buried her pet cat up to his neck and left him for her to find. My grandfather thought that she had done it so she was spanked but when my mother came to investigate, we got a spanking too.”

Her grandfather, an avid hunter, would cook anything and everything that he killed. She remembers eating turtle, raccoon, deer, rabbit, and squirrel. “Back then it was all good because we did not have a grocery store that we could go to, most of what we ate was raised on the farm or hunted.” Playing by the root cellar that was dug in the backyard or near the smokehouse where their pork was stored after the hog killing was not allowed. “It was too dangerous, but I guess they did not want us messing anything up”

The hog killings were a social occasion where all the neighbors would come and help clean chitlings, dry pork skin, and help make sausage. “Our food was seasoned primarily with the lard that was gotten from the hog killing.” The process of slaughtering and retrieving all the edible parts of the hog was tedious and time consuming. One day was spent getting all the tools ready and the other was actually killing, hanging, boiling, and sorting the hog parts. As pay for helping, the neighbors were given some of the meat or whatever they wanted.

The hog killings were a social occasion where all the neighbors would come and help clean chitlings, dry pork skin, and help make sausage.

“Growing up on the farm was tough and a lot harder than it is today,” she recalls while telling me about how they used to gather and cure tobacco when she was still a young girl. The men usually pulled the mule or horse with a tobacco track behind it. The kids usually walked behind that gathering handfuls of leaves and putting them with the bundles that were being put on tobacco sticks. “My grandfather didn’t get his first tractor until much later.”

When the men got back to the farm they would bring all the sticks with them and they would begin putting them up on tracks in the barns where they were to be cured. One man was always

chosen—"mostly my grandpa"—to keep the wood burning and to watch out for fires. This would last for a week, then it would be taken down and sent to the market to be auctioned off.

One of the best rewards for doing all that hard labor was the enjoyment that she felt of getting able to buy a soft drink with the few cents that she had made. She only made a dollar a day until she was a young teenager and was paid weekly for the eight to ten hours she would work helping harvest tobacco.

"Another hard thing to do was harvesting corn, which was hot work." They weren't allowed to wear shorts, so that made it very uncomfortable. They had to wear dresses. "Everywhere we went we wore dresses; little girls did not wear pants." The older women wore aprons over their dresses and on occasion would wear bonnets that were handmade.

Her mom would use feed sacks or seed bags to make dresses for the girls. The money that she would make helping with tobacco would normally go to her parents; then, what was left was used for buying clothes for the next school year. Being the oldest meant that all her clothes would get kept and passed down to her sisters. When her older cousins would get a new coat they would pass it down to her once they had out grown them. She enjoyed this because it was like getting something new and she got it first simply for being the oldest.

She remembers her grandmother and the other older ladies in the area getting together for their quilting bees. They would all gather at one house and set up a frame in the middle of the room. "Small children, including me, would hide underneath and listen to the gossip."

When she was a young girl there was no such thing as childcare. Everybody looked after each other and most of the time it was the older kids looking out for the younger kids. While the adults were working the younger kids would often be playing in the barn where it was cooler and there was a less chance of them getting stepped on or kicked by a mule.

They did not have a car at the time and got around on a mule and cart. "My grandmother used to carry us to church that way and we would stay almost the whole day cleaning up the graveyard. While we were there we would eat biscuits and listen to her tell us about our family history. I visited there a few years ago and remember that very vividly," she said.

Her grandmother also made some of the best biscuits that she would carry to the graveyard and they would snack on them while working. They were the best biscuits she says that she has ever had. "It was probably all the lard and buttermilk that was used to make them. They were all the same size and cooked on a pan in a wood stove and were just perfect, if only I could make them

and they turn out just as wonderful, but I am not the best when it comes to any kind of baking,” Edith says.

When she was about ten years old, her mother married Purly Price. Her mother gave birth to two girls, Sue and Janet, shortly after her marriage to Purly. She remembers that they had a rough time because of the job her stepdad had and the fact they never stayed in one place very long. Her stepfather was a sharecropper which meant they were often moving and having to change schools: “After one move I didn’t have shoes to wear to school so I missed a few days and I remember that my Aunt brought me her Sunday shoes so I could go to school.” Sadly, she talked about attending her Aunt’s funeral last year.

After a few years of moving from town to town the family finally settled in Warsaw when Edith was thirteen years old. She was able to make lifelong friends that she still keeps in touch with today because they did not move again until after she graduated from James Kenan High School in Warsaw. Some of the girls that she was friends with and graduated with still come and visit every now and then but they all live in different places now so it can be difficult at sometimes.

Religion was important in the 1950s. Most people attended churches. If they did not have a car they would go on a wooden cart pulled by a mule or horse. The windows were raised all the time because there was no air conditioning at the time. Most churches at the time did not have a fellowship hall or a bathroom.

When there was a celebration held there, wire would be strung from tree to tree and a sheet would be placed over them. “This was truly dinner on the grounds,” she says. It was a fun time and all the food was always delicious, and the flies certainly had their fill. This would work fine unless an unexpected rain storm would come up, and everyone would typically just go home.

Religion was very important to Edith’s family but they did not attend a regular church service. Purly liked the tent revivals, so that is what they mostly attended. The preachers were normally local and Evangelist. When the service would start some people would run up and down the aisle and others would be jumping up and down speaking in tongues which would be frightening for the children that were there. It was especially frightening for Edith because they had only attended a small quiet little church prior to her father’s death.

Religion is still important to her now like it was then. She has been attending the same church, Long Ridge Free Will Baptist, for the past forty years. It is where her children and her grandchildren have been raised. She is a member of the lady’s auxiliary and is still helping with

projects and different services that they help plan. It is also where her husband and she enjoy spending time together.

Entertainment when she was young came from some of the simplest things. Movies or shows that were mainly westerns and dances were what Edith recalls as being some of the best fun she has had. "Westerns were often full of violence, but you always knew that the bad guys were going to lose and the good guys normally in white cowboy hats would win."

The dances were often held on Saturday nights. All that was needed was a place and someone to play the music. A fiddle, banjo player, or guitar player was often the source of music. She recalls that Rommie's class raised money for a scholarship to New York City in 1955.

She was married in 1963 when she was eighteen years old to Rommie Hill, who was twenty-seven years old. They were not married in a church, but rather were married in the living room of her grandmother's house. Common in the fifties and sixties, people often got married young and had several children. "That was the expected thing to do. I only had two." Her first, my mom, was born in 1964 when she was nineteen, and her second, my uncle, in 1967 when she was twenty-two.

Luckily birth control devices became available in the early sixties. This meant that women would stop having large families of six to ten and would just have two or three. Also in this period, in the sixties and seventies, more women were beginning to get jobs and work outside of the family farms to help support their families.

Her children grew up on the family farm that her and Rommie had started, "Their childhood was very different from mine but they still had chores to do both on the farm and at home." They both learned the value of work and the importance of having a good work ethic. "Luckily I was able to go back to nursing school when my children were small."

She had tried working on the farm and doing factory work for National Spinning but it was not for her. She decided to go to school and get her degree in nursing. "I practically had no life for the two years it took me to get my nursing degree," says Edith.

She graduated at the top of her class with a 3.74 overall G.P.A., "This was before my children and more recently my grandchildren decided I was demented and extremely old," she said jokingly. She has also received and been nominated for several different awards over the course of her college career: Dean's list consistently from 1971-1973, Outstanding Students in American

Junior Colleges in 1973, Outstanding Women of America, and Highest G.P.A in a Degree Program in 1973.

“Growing up I was told to do only what I was told to do, to be good, and don’t talk back. I believe I had a hard time being assertive as an adult because of this, but, getting married, raising a family, going to college, and being a nurse has helped me,” she says.

Learning to be more assertive in nursing was important because she became an advocate for her patients. She had to help them get help when they couldn’t help themselves. “Because doctors often see their patients ten minutes whereas a nurse can see them for much longer.”

Laughing, she says, “Most of the doctors I have worked with over the past 36 years wouldn’t think I was a submissive, quiet, good little girl.” She loved nursing, and over the course of her career has seen many “drastic” changes. Nurses today have much more responsibility and autonomy compared to when she started in 1973.

Recently she retired from nursing in July of 2009 and is enjoying having free time to enjoy her grandkids and just being there for her family. She worked for twenty years on the med-surge floor at Wayne Memorial Hospital on the night shift. She says, “It is a big adjustment. I am used to being busy all the time and being up all night working and now I have to get used to sleeping during the night and being busy during the day. Sometimes I wonder how I ever had time for work.”

A new thing that she is doing is having a breakfast once a week with her family and friends that live nearby and are retired. They swap weeks and go to whoever is doing the entertaining that week. She also enjoys a monthly event that some of the retirees from her floor have begun doing just to keep up on the gossip and what each other is doing.

In the afternoon, during school days, she goes and picks up the two youngest from school and is better known as “G-ma’s taxi service.” She really does enjoy it, even when she complains about it, it is all in fun. She says that it is very entertaining and that it has been a great way to keep up with what they are doing in school and in general with their lives. She enjoys feeling that they would do anything that was ever needed from her and that they would not hesitate to ask or tell her about it.

Her four grandchildren have grown up in the same neighborhood, but only two of them have really done much farm work. Myself, 20, the oldest who is following her career as a nurse, and Josh, 16, who is most likely going to be a farmer. Kyle, 15, and Allison Brooke, 12, are still doing

their own thing and figuring out who they are and what they want to do in the future. “My grandchildren have all grown up in a different world than what I did. Each see progress on the farm, and with television and internet, have seen other ways to live than by just farming.”

“I have tried to be the kind of grandmother that mine was, Grandma Frances, she always had a sense of humor until her death in 1992. She always had time for her grandkids and we knew that she loved us. She was not rich materially but she was rich in genuine love and kindness,” Edith recalls. She knew how much Edith loved to read so she would always keep the newspapers and magazines and would make sure that she got to read them.

It is safe to say that Edith has had a very fulfilling life and there is no telling what there is left for her to accomplish. It is not clear to her what she will be doing but she does know that she will be spending a lot of time with her family and doing the best she knows how to do.

Iradene Lister

the story of her life

DONOVAN SPENCER

Iradene Lister, my grandmother, was born September 27th, 1946, at her home in Elizabeth City, where she was delivered by a midwife at four in morning. She was born the daughter of my great-grandmother Martha Lee Barington Macpherson, who was twenty four at the time, and my great-grandfather Reverend David Lee Macpherson, who was forty two. She was the fourth born child out of ten.

My grandmother grew up on a pigeon farm. She said with her face frowned, “it wasn’t the best place to live and it was far from the easiest.” She and her brothers and sisters had to wake up at five a.m. to pick five hundred pigeons for a Chinese buyer, then go home and take a bath before school. Schools were still segregated back then, and on a disciplinary level they were extremely strict. It was funny to me, because if you got in trouble your teacher could beat you, and then your teacher would take you home, tell your mother and father, and they would beat you.”

“Everybody knew everybody and communities were close, she says. “Anybody in the community that you were brought up in had permission to tear yo ass up because the community helped raise you.” I never knew people were so close—it came as a shock to me. My grandma specifically



Iradene in her Kitchen

remembers a time that her neighbors did beat her, though she doesn't distinctly remember the beatings at school, only that they happened. She was outside one day, sitting down in the grass cutting up a pair of her shoes. Why she was doing that she doesn't know, "probably for a stupid reason," she says.

While she was cutting up her shoes, one of her friends at the time had seen her doing this so she came outside to tell her, "I'm going to tell on you!" My grandma told me with her eyebrows squinched and her finger pointed that she had told the girl, "If you tell I'm going to beat you up." The girl did tell on her and her parents beat my grandmother and after they did my grandmother says she beat the girl. She then leaned back in her chair smiling as she told me, "That girl didn't tell on me no more."

Growing up, my grandmother had to go to church, not because her father was the Reverend, but because back then church wasn't something you said "no" to. "We had to go to church—we had no choice. It wasn't 'I don't want to go, I want to sleep in.' No sir, you went, and if you said you didn't want to, you got that belt hung to you, then you still went," she said. They had to go to church every Sunday, leaving Saturdays their only day for fun in the entire week.

Some of the things they did on Saturdays was going to the movies, playing hop scotch, hide and go seek, or having parties. These parties weren't normal parties, though. Her father didn't like dancing. They could listen to the music, eat ice cream, cake, chips, and cookies, but they couldn't dance. My grandmother says she loved to dance and she just couldn't help but dance. She made sure not to do it in front of her father. She does recall one day dancing to a song on the radio in her bedroom when her father came in with a metal pole. She said "Just as fast as he came in the door, I was out the door, but he didn't do anything except laugh and watch me run off and he didn't touch me later either."

At the age of twelve, my grandmother met my grandfather who was thirteen going on fourteen at the time. She was with one of her best friends and it was his cousin Phyllis. She lived in Elizabeth City, and my grandfather was down from New York for part of the summer and was staying with her and his Aunt Geneva. He was standing on the balcony when he saw her and she looked up and saw him looking down and he said to her "what you looking at" and she said "you!"

After they had that quick conversation, the rest of the time he was visiting they were inseparable every Saturday. They went to the movies, walked around town, and went to a juke joint together called "Dan Perkins." She said to me, "If my daddy knew I was talking to any boys at the age of

twelve, I would've been grounded till I was sixteen, which is the age we were allowed to date." A few months after my grandmother had met my grandfather, it was time for him to go back, but before he left, he told her, "I'll be back if you don't mind waiting for two years."

She told him she would wait, but she would have friends that were boys when he came back and he couldn't get mad her. He said "OK." My grandmother waited for two years for my grandfather to get back, and within those two years she had gone through two birthdays and was now fifteen, and he was sixteen. He did what he said he would do, and that's what he did.

He went to her house, introduced himself to her parents and from that day forward they didn't leave each other's side. When she turned sixteen, he asked her father if he could marry her. Her father said, "Yeah, but let me tell you something—that girl right there, she mean." My grandfather told her father, "I can handle her." He told him, "Alright, go for it."

My grandfather waited three months before he married her, but on January 26, 1963, at 3:00 p.m., they married. She moved from Elizabeth City to Long Island, NY, with my grandfather, James Willie Lister. When she was seventeen, and after she gave birth to her first child, Tracy Lister died at thirteen days old. While in New York, they had four more children. The second born was James Lister "Pooky"; this is my father. After him came Aaron Lister, Shawn Lister, and Ginger Lister, the last born and the only daughter she had other than Tracy.

My father and my Uncle Aaron "Meatball" gave her the most trouble she said it was because "they always stayed in trouble. Always fighting and always doing something stupid." My father was sitting down beside me as she told me this. I looked at him, but he just shrugged his shoulders and said "Hey, we did do a lot of dumb shit."

She got into telling me one of their stories of what she liked to call "their adventures." My grandfather was a logger at the time, and my dad and uncle decided to go into the swamp woods with axes and cut down this big oak that was in the swamp. "When those dummies got their mind set on something they were going to do it. When they got back to the house with mud on their faces and both soaked up to their thighs and stinking, I told them to go take a bath, but not to dry off to just come back into the living room.

"When they got back into the living room I put the belt to both of them." Laughing, she finished by telling me that "neither of them could sit down for a good little while." Shawn was the calm one but if some one made him mad he was mad and when I say mad I mean over the top. My grandmother told me story about their cousin Rose. She would babysit them, and my Uncle

Shawn and my father had planted this garden in front of the house. Her cousin Rose had stepped in it on her way back in the house, and my father and Shawn just kept bothering her about it.

Her cousin Rose was getting so mad at them, she decided to put them outside for a while. My Uncle Shawn was already past his boiling point, and he wasn't going to get put outside and have his garden being stepped in, so he picked up a brick and threw it through the window. A little while after that my grandfather showed up and calmed my Uncle Shawn down real fast because he knows how he can get when he's upset.

The last born, and part of the reason why they moved back to Elizabeth City in 1972, is my Aunt Ginger—"GeGe." She was born a sickly child. My grandparents liked The King's Daughters Hospital, which is in Norfolk and is a good hospital for kids. But taking that drive from New York was not going to happen when they could easily drive there from Elizabeth City. As my Aunt Ginger got older, she became better and stronger. She wasn't as sickly as she used to be, and she didn't have to go to the hospital that much any more.

As she got older, she began to like animals, especially my grandfather's hunting dogs. One of those dogs was her favorite to be around until it had got rabies, my grandmother said. She told me, "The door in the house was left open, I guess by your grandfather, and the dog had came right in the house. I don't know how he didn't see the dog, or why the dog didn't go after him, but when it came in the house, Ginger ran to my room, and the dog came running after her."

She said the both of them were screaming at the top of their lungs, because not only did Ginger forget to close the room door, but there was a dog foaming out of the mouth and neither one of them could go anywhere. My grandfather heard them screaming and came running back to the house with a gun. He didn't want to kill his dog, but if he didn't one of them would've ended up in the hospital. So he pulled the trigger, and immediately after, my Aunt Ginger was on the floor beside the dog. Later she helped my grandfather bury it.

My grandmother also had to get her first job after my Aunt Ginger's birth—her first job other than working on the pigeon farm as a child. That job would also be her last until her retirement as a custodian at Northeastern High School and also at Weeksville Elementary School. She had to walk and hitch-hike for three years in the rain, snow, and sleet, until 1975, which is when she was able to buy her first car, a black and white 1969 Plymouth. "It was a big ugly thing, but it beat hitch-hiking and walking by a long shot." Her cousin had taught her how to drive, and once she learned, she said she couldn't get enough of it.

She liked her new job because she liked kids. She said they were messy from time to time, but they tried to keep it clean for her. She worked at Northeastern High School for eighteen years and worked at Weeksville Elementary for another fifteen as a custodian until she retired in 2006, a year after my grandfather passed away. She said the pay was good when she first started because everything was cheap and the economy wasn't bad, at least she didn't think it was.

She told me a five pound bag of sugar was fifty cents—to fill up on gas was at the most \$6.00. Cigarettes (which she does not smoke) were twenty cents and would've been twenty one but there was a penny in the box, so they were really twenty cents.

She said, "They had no reason to buy greens or meat, and the meat that they did buy from the store, most of the time, was hamburgers and steak.

Other than that, they would shoot it, and some of those meats would be deer, bear, and pheasants. "Now everything is store-bought, and if I can't tell that the economy is terrible now, I must be a dummy."

In 1979, my grandmother and grandfather were able to build their own house. It wasn't much different from the one they moved out of, but it was a house that they had built and not anyone else's. It didn't have plumbing, which means there were no bathrooms or running water. They had to use a water pump to get water, which on occasion would get stopped up. But my grandfather put an end to that, according to my grandmother. He decided to shoot 12-gauge buck shot down the pump to unstop it. It wasn't a bright idea, but he felt that it could work, and it did.

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Even though there weren't any bathrooms, they still had a private area that they could go to for the bathroom. This area was known as a toilet house. The house didn't have a heating unit, but it did have a wood heater and stove. "That wood heater kept us nice and warm in the winter and that stove cooked just as good as any new model one." My grandmother would cook frog legs, chicken from the farm, squirrel, deer, bear, rabbit, and more.

They left that house and got a new one with electricity, plumbing, television, an electric stove and kerosene heater sometime in the 1980s. By 1985, all of my grandmother's kids had moved out except my Aunt Ginger. My dad was living in an apartment and working at a restaurant. My Uncle Aaron was in the Army and was a paratrooper. He was squad leader of his platoon. My Uncle Shawn was just getting out of school only a year behind my Uncle Aaron and he decided to go to college. My Aunt Ginger graduated from Northeastern High School in 1990 because she wasn't sickly any more, and she went to school for nursing.

In 1991, my grandmother had gotten her first grandchild out of five grandchildren. My grandmother's first grandchild was me, Donovan Spencer, and from the age of two months to ten years, I was always at her house. I stayed with her so much when I younger, I would call her mom. She would watch me because my mom wanted to go out on weekends, and sometimes she would watch me just because her and grandfather wanted me to stay with them.

My grandmother told me I would wake up at two a.m. crying and screaming, "I want my momma", and my mother would have to call her because I wouldn't quiet down, and my grandmother would talk to me and tell me that "everything is okay, and go back to sleep." After she would tell me this, I would hand my mother the phone and go to sleep. My grandmother almost lost me two times when I was younger. The first time she almost lost me, I was at home in Columbia and I was 4 ½. I thought it would be fun to sneak up behind my cousin and jump on her back. Not smart, because once I jumped on her back, she fell backwards and my head hit the corner of a dresser that was in my mother's room.

Instantly, blood started pouring from the side of my head, so my mother grabbed me and started telling my sister to call the ambulance. I told my mother I was tired, and she said, "Don't go to sleep, please don't go to sleep." I woke up in the ambulance and passed back out. I woke up again in my mother's arms leaving out of the emergency room. I woke up a third time to see my grandmother at my house. She had driven an hour and ten minutes to hold me and say, "Don't ever scare me like that again."

My grandmother told me that my head looked lopsided and those seven stitches didn't make it look any better, but I had calmed down a lot after that near-fatal incident. The second time she almost lost me I was 5, only a few months after I had gotten my stitches taken out. I would almost drown while fishing with my grandfather. I was standing on this big pipe in the river, and I slipped off of it somehow, and as soon as I did, my first reaction was grabbing on to the first thing that was in my reach. That was a briar patch, and a bad choice of things to grab it was.

My grandfather rushed over to pull me out, but I didn't want to let go. He just kept saying "Donovan you got to let go and give me your hand so I can pull you up." I let go after about 7 minutes and when my grandmother had seen the little holes in my palm she started fussing. My grandfather kept telling her it was okay I kept telling her it was okay and she just kept fussing, after a while she finished yelling and patched my hand up and said, "You betta not eva stand on that pipe again." I just shook my head and said, "Okay."

It only took three days before me and my grandfather were fishing again, and I was standing on that pipe, but I was very cautious when I was on it, and I didn't fall off the pipe any more, and I didn't have any more near-death experiences that would scare my grandmother. After me came her other four grandchildren—two by Uncle Aaron, Sidra Lister (12) who already thinks she's grown, and Jordan Lister (10) who has his mind focused on video games, school work, and basketball.

The youngest of her grandkids are my little brother Rashawn Lister (8) who has his mind focused on school, but he hasn't figured out how to keep quiet yet, and my little sister Jaquira Lister (6) who listens and knows what she's supposed to do and she tries to be quiet during school, but she still needs a little work on that area, and those to are my fathers kids, and she says all the time that we are all her "sweet grandchildren."

In January of 2001, my grandfather had to get a 5-bypass, know as a cabbage, which is a type of heart bypass surgery. During his surgery in order to keep his heart in working condition, the doctors had to take veins from his leg and put them in his heart. But somebody had some dirty tools and hands, because after his surgery, he got a staff infection, and instead of being home in three days, he got home in three weeks. By the time my grandfather got home from Norfolk General Hospital and was put on medication for his staff infection, it was too late.

The infection had spread throughout his body, and through his blood stream, and he ended up in ICU at Albemarle Hospital from February 2001 to April 2001, with intestinal issues. My grandmother told me that I went to go see my grandfather in the hospital, but I didn't remember it. She said, "Everybody who went in that room had to wear gloves and a mask to keep him from getting infected again."

When my grandfather got back home from Albemarle hospital he only weighed 99 pounds. My grandmother said he kept looking at his arms and wrists and kept asking her "Am I really this small? Is this me?" and she told me she said, "Yeah, that's you, and you are that small, but don't worry, cause I'm gonna fatten you right on up." She got his weight back up, but he wasn't healthy,

and she knew it. But the only reason she knew he wasn't healthy was the day she spoke to the doctor at Albemarle hospital. "Is he as healthy and strong as he thinks he is?" He said to my grandmother, "No he isn't, but the body sometimes tricks the mind into thinking everything is okay after going through as much pain as he went through."

That doctor was right, because in 2002, my grandfather was diagnosed with kidney failure and was put on dialysis. He had to get the dirty blood pumped out of his body, and the clean back in by a machine with the aid of needles four hours a day and three days a week. Not only was he diagnosed with a health problem in 2002, but my grandmother was diagnosed with diabetes. She had to go to Duke to get a tumor removed from her parathyroid, and a few months after that surgery, she had to go back to Duke to get surgery done on her gallbladder. But even after she went through all of this, she's still looking healthy.

My grandfather passed after years of dialysis, liver problems and lung problems, on September 11, 2005. Since he died I haven't been doing any of things that I loved to do when he was living—which is fish, go to the dragway, and argue over whether we were going to watch cartoons or

the western channel. And since my grandmother was always on my side, I got to watch cartoons most of the time.

My grandmother says, "I miss those times, and I miss your grandfather, but do you know after the doctor pulled his plug, I was happy for him because he wasn't in pain anymore. I knew he was in a better place, and because his last words were thank you."

My grandmother, Iradene Lister, was married for 42 years to my grandfather,



Iradene, James, & James's sister

James Willie Lister. She has been a widow for the past five years, and she says she plans on being one for years to come, and she has no problem with it because she has kids and grandkids to give her comfort and keep her going.

My grandmother is a strong black, white, and Cherokee Indian woman. I am very proud to be her grandson, and this is her life story, told by me, and written for her and my family members to see.

Lois Christine Waters Rose

a lifetime of roses

JESSICA ADAMS

Here is a saying that March winds and April showers bring May flowers. In this case, May 23, 1932, brought one of the grandest flowers of all. This is the life story of Lois Christine Waters Rose, as told to her Granddaughter Jessica.

The early 1930s was a very difficult time for the Waters family of Pinetown, NC. They had nine children to feed, and everyday was a struggle. In the summer of 1931, two of the Waters sisters were sent to work on a large farm in Pitt County. The sisters would live with their employers, the Johnsons, for the summer. Louise Kathleen age 18, who was called “Nat” because she was no bigger than a gnat, was one of those sisters.



Lois Christine Waters Rose

The Johnsons had a son named Henry who was about the same age as Nat. Having unrelated young people living under the same roof often leads to romance, and this was just the case of Henry and Nat.

At the end of the summer, when the last of the crops had been harvested and no work was left to be done, Nat found herself having to return to Pinetown, leaving behind the boy she loved. It was late August and Nat spent one last night with Henry, one that would change her life.

Not long after Nat returned to Pinetown, she discovered she was pregnant. Her family contacted the Johnsons and informed them of Nat’s predicament. Of course the Johnsons were not happy. Henry wanted to marry Nat, but his mother refused, and sent him away. Nat’s family decided that she did not need to marry someone from a family that did not approve of her.

Lois Christine Waters was born on May 23, 1932, in her grandparent's home. Some complications arose during the birth and a doctor had to be summoned to assist in the delivery, which ultimately resulted in the birth of Nat and Henry's healthy baby girl.

Nat was young and poor. With the help of her family, she did the best she could to provide for her daughter Lois. She knew that another mouth to feed was a hardship for her family, but she loved Lois and chose to keep and raise her to the best of her ability.

In the 1930s, the world was suffering from the greatest economic depression of the 20th century. No one was immune, both rich and poor found themselves struggling to maintain their lifestyles. "I was born in 1932, that says enough right there, we were poor as dirt," said Lois. Her mother had married Bonner Waters when she was about three. Bonner was "less than affectionate" and Lois feared him from the start. He worked as a carpenter and was regarded as a very good one, however with tough economic times, "nobody could afford to have any work done, so we just barely got by," she explained. Her mother took work in the tobacco fields and Bonner did odd jobs, just to be able to afford a small two room house in Pinetown.

In 1936, about a year after her mother married Bonner, her sister Jean was born. "Jean was my little sister, she was different from me. I was timid and shy, Jean wasn't. I would tell Jean to ask her daddy for a nickel and she would say, 'Ask him yourself.' She was not shy at all, and she usually did ask him for me."

Bonner continued to instill fear in Lois all throughout her childhood. He was very strict, Lois said, "Mama always wanted me to wear a straw hat when I went out. For some reason I couldn't seem to ever get the hat on right, so Bonner put a little piece of string in the front so I'd know which way it went. If I didn't have it on right, I'd get the belt." The same went for her shoes, they had to be placed just so, under her bed or else she would be punished. "I always tried to go unnoticed, I was a timid child and I didn't want to do anything to draw

Mama always wanted me to wear a straw hat when I went out. For some reason, I couldn't seem to ever get the hat on right, so Bonner put a little piece of string in the front so I'd know which way it went.

attention.” Bonner had spent time in prison for murder, before her mother had married him and he had a reputation of not always being very friendly.

Her cousin Jeannette lived across the field. They spent lots of time playing together. For



entertainment Lois recalled, “A man from Williamston named Mr. Corey, would show up at the school with a movie on Thursday nights. He’d show a main movie and then a cartoon.” Once in a while, a circus would come to town and her mother would take her to see the show which she enjoyed. With a little smile she said, “I always thought my whole childhood was bad, but looking back, I do have some good memories.” There was also a little store in Pinetown called Cutler’s. “Mostly men hung out in there, but I remember they had a jukebox, and I thought that was the neatest thing I had ever seen. Sometimes us kids would go inside in the afternoons and listen to the jukebox.”

One memory that was not so good was a trip to the dentist. “When I was about eight, my mama sent me to the dentist. One of my cousins went with me; she weren’t much older than me. We had to walk all the way from Pinetown out to Hwy. 32, which was several miles. Once we got to 32, we caught a bus to Washington. The dentist pulled one of my teeth, he didn’t even deaden it, and then we rode the bus back and had to walk all the way home. On the way home, the place where the tooth had been started throbbing, it was the worst pain ever. I didn’t think I would ever make it, so I still don’t like going to the dentist.”

When Lois was about eight, her mother and stepfather moved to Virginia, so that Bonner could find work. World War II was underway and jobs helping the war effort were aiding the economy in making a comeback. “My mama took Jean and left me in Pinetown with Bonner’s sister Betty. I felt like nobody loved or wanted me, I remember being very sad. I did go stay for a little while in Virginia, but one day I followed a bunch of children off to a store down from the school, I couldn’t find my way back to school, so I hung around the store for a while, till the people were



Lois & Jean in Virginia

looking at me like I might steal something, then I took off and finally found my way home instead of going back to school. It wasn't long after that, my mama sent me back to Pinetown."

One of the things she recalls about living in Norfolk was that "we had what they called blackouts. We couldn't have any lights and the windows had to stay covered at night to keep the Germans from spotting the coast. That was kind of scary."

Nat and Bonner stayed in Virginia for a couple of years. When they returned, Lois was 10 and her mother was pregnant with her brother Steve. She remembers Steve's arrival with much joy. "I loved him so much! For the first time in my life, I felt like I loved

somebody that loved me back." She would tote Steve around on her hip everywhere she went. "I was crazy about him, and I loved to babysit him when mama had to work in tobacco." She says she still loves and treasures her brother because he came along at a time in her life when she needed him most and is very grateful that she still has him around to love.

Her babysitting Steve would not last long. Her uncle McKinley, who was Bonner's brother, decided that she was old enough to work in tobacco herself. Her Uncle was not like Bonner. She loved him dearly. He was very kind. At 10, she started her first job making \$2 a day "handing" tobacco. Working each summer in tobacco allowed her to purchase things she needed. "I remember when I bought my first bra." Things of that nature were not commonly spoke of in that era, so when her mother announced to the family, "Well, she bought herself a brazier today," it was very embarrassing.

When she entered 9th grade, she had to change schools. Pinetown only had an elementary school. When students reached 9th grade, they rode a bus to Bath to attend high school. While

she was attending school, a schoolmate informed her that there was a man staying in town (Bath) that said he was her father and wanted to meet her. Lois was unsure what to do, so she confided in her life-long friend Jeannette. "Jeannette went straight home and told her mama and of course Jeanette's mother told mama," she says with a look of disappointment. Her mother begged her not to see him. "She said if I wanted to know what he looked like, to look in a mirror." One of the things that her mother was always fearful of was that the Johnsons might kidnap Lois. Once a message was sent to the family saying, "They were coming to take me, even if they had to wade through blood to get me." Bonner had sent a message back to the Johnsons letting them know that they would indeed be wading through blood if they came for her.

Having been born out of wed-lock and into a depression, becoming the step-daughter of a man she feared, and growing up in a home where she felt unwanted and often unloved, Lois longed for someone to enter her life and change all that. When she was 16, she met Norris Rose. "I dated Norris and Jeanette dated his brother Hambone" They called him "Hambone" because he was so skinny. They went on double dates, all the while Lois was growing fonder of Hambone. "I liked Norris well enough, he was good looking and clean cut, but Hambone was more suave. He seemed more refined and did things Norris didn't, like hold the car door open, he knew how to treat a girl."

She waited patiently and never let on that she liked Hambone. Hambone must have been feeling the same but she didn't know it. "I just knew that if he kissed me, he'd be mine forever." As it turned out, her friend Isabel was dating Hambone's friend Dan Brooks, so they asked her if she wanted a ride home with the three of them and she said yes. "Of course it wasn't long before he laid one on me [a kiss], and from that moment on, he was mine." Jeannette's family was devastated. Lois had stolen the only "good man" Jeannette had ever known. Jeannette and Norris dated for a while but it didn't work out.

Lois and Hambone had their first official date. "We went over to Belhaven to see a band called Mustard and Gravy. I still have a picture of the band somewhere. They gave them out, and I saved it as a memento; that was April 4, 1948." Lois and Hambone dated for nine months. He had been in the Navy before he met her and when he returned to Beaufort County, he went to work driving a log truck. "He didn't have a car, so he would come to the house on the log truck and pick me up for dates. Somebody gave Norris a chance at a car, and it was the winning ticket, so Norris would let him use the car sometimes." They would go to Washington to see a movie at the Park View Drive-In. "After the movie we would go to Tony's Sandwich Shop. Tony's was a local favorite, run by Tony Gountikas and was downtown Washington. "The girls never went into

Tony's. For some reason or the other, we would stay in the car while the guys all went in and ordered and brought it out to us!" Like most teenagers in love, she says with a blushing smile "We would go parking." I asked her to elaborate on what "parking" meant, and she said, "Oh, we just found a nice quiet place to park, and smooched..."

Bonner liked Hambone and didn't mind him coming by to visit. On one such occasion his log truck got stuck. Lois recalled, "We lived up a long muddy path, his truck got stuck when he was bringing me home, everybody had already gone to bed and I didn't want to wake them, so I made him a place on the couch and he stayed the night." Luckily, in the morning, Hambone was still alive.

Not long after the incident with the truck getting stuck, Lois and Hambone started talking about getting married. She mentioned to her mother that they had talked about getting married and her mother's response was, "remember however you make your bed, you're gonna have to be the one to lay in it!" Soon after, on a cold Saturday night in January 1949, Lois and Ben decided to elope. They hadn't told anyone except their friends Dan and Isabel Brooks. When she asked him where they would live he told her, "with my daddy and brothers." She took him up on his offer, "we went to Belhaven on a Saturday night, there was a Doctor there in town that was available at night and he did our blood test. The next Saturday night, we headed to Plymouth with Dan and Isabel, they were the witnesses. When we got there, the Justice of the Peace wouldn't give us licenses because I was only 17. We had to go back to Pinetown and get mama. She was at Aunt Pink's store and we had to go in and ask her. She agreed to do it, so we were married by Mr. Tom Freeman the Justice of the Peace, in the police department in Plymouth."

On their wedding night they stayed at her (Lois's) house. "Bonner tried to rig up the bed so that it would fall. It was supposed to be a wedding night prank, but it didn't



work and we didn't know anything about it 'til they told us the next day." On the next day, Lois moved her things to Hambone's house where he lived with his father and three of his brothers. Hambone's mother had died when he was young, so it had always been just him, his brothers and sister Adelaide. Adelaide had gone off to college so Lois was the only woman in the house.

Benjamin Hilton Rose (Benny) was born in September of 1949, nine months after Lois and Hambone were married. "I had wanted to wait 'til we got a place of our own, but it didn't work out that way. Benny was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen; everybody was crazy about him, especially Bonner." Bonner then became known as "Gran Bonner" and Nat as "Granny Nat." Lois became pregnant with her second child when Benny was a year old. "We finally found a small house in Pinetown, it was called a shotgun house cause you could open the front door and shoot right out the back door. It weren't much but I was glad to have a place of our own with another baby on the way." In June of 1951, they welcomed a baby girl, Margret Rose. "We couldn't come up with a name for Margret. We took her home from the hospital and it was a while before I could get him to agree on the name, she was called baby girl Rose for at least a week. We just gave her a first name, even though we called her Margret Jean, but only Margret was put on her birth certificate. When she turned sixteen and went to get her driver's license, they told her she could add a middle name and she named herself Margret Michelle." Thirteen months after Margret was born, in July of 1952, another baby girl was born. Again, they had trouble picking a name, but they decided on Frances, who also never got a middle name.



They had managed to get two girls in the process of trying to have a little brother for Benny to play with. The "shotgun house" was only three rooms, a living room, kitchen and bedroom. There was no room to add that little brother for Benny. "Hambone knew a man that had bought a dragline. Franklin Whitley asked him to come run it for him and he did. Later on he sold it to Braxton Bell. Braxton fixed up an old two-story house "Up Pungo" and we moved." Finally, with

a little extra room they decided to try again for that little brother. In November of 1954, Carolyn Louise Rose was born. They had some trouble picking the name, but Hambone agreed this time with one exception, that they call her Louise because he was not very fond of the name Carolyn. They finally gave up on a little boy after Louise.

By twenty-two Lois had four children, which kept her very busy. She was dependent on Hambone to take her wherever she needed to go. They had finally gotten a “red jeep” recalls Lois. When she was twenty-four, she decided to learn to drive and get her driver’s license. “I would practice driving around and around in the yard,” she says. “I would load up the kids and practice.” “Yeah she probably put us in the car so she wouldn’t run over us,” her daughter Louise chuckled.

In 1959, the Roses moved to Terra Ceia. The house “Up Pungo” was large and very hard to heat. “There were places you could see the ground through the floorboards.” So when they got a chance to move into the Gaylord house, they jumped on the chance, being it was much nicer. “We lived in an area known as White Six,” says Lois’s daughter Louise, “It was given that name because it was a predominantly black neighborhood, but there were six white families that live on farms in the area.”

Lois and Hambone continued to raise their family in Terra Ceia until all of them were grown and gone. However, while the children were growing up, so was Bonner. “He was so good to my children, he loved them so much and they loved him. Margret wanted to be right behind him, every step he took. He gave them each a nickname: Benny was Dock, Margret was Fannie, Frances was Buggy, and Louise was Creepy.” Frances’s nickname has stuck around, and her family still calls her “Bugs or Buggy.”



Lois: Learning to Drive

Lois began to think that maybe Bonner wasn't as bad as what she had created in her childhood fears. Lois says, "At Christmas, Bonner would nearly go into debt to see that my children had a good Christmas, I always thought maybe it was his way of making up for the way I was treated as a child." Her children loved to spend Christmas at their Gran Bonner's and Granny Nat's. "One year I remember that the children got us up at daylight, opened their gift, and were ready to leave for their Grandparents. It was our family tradition; we would open gifts, have some breakfast, and go visit the grandparents. The first stop would be at their Granddaddy Rose's [Hambone's father], so that we could drop off a little gift. On this Christmas morning, Bugsy asked if we could just stop and put his gift in the mailbox, she wanted to hurry and get to Granny and Gran Bonner's house. They always had the best Christmas gifts at Mama and Bonner's."

The family always had large Easter gatherings also. Lois' daughters, Frances and Louise reminisced about their childhood Easters: "Every Easter we would get a new outfit, shoes and the works. We each got an Easter Basket and when we went to Granny and Gran Bonner's we would have an Easter Egg Hunt and then eat the boiled eggs and have a Pepsi."

Holidays were special to Lois now that she had her own little ones and a husband, whom she adored. Christmas and Easter were such special times for their family, but there was another special holiday for the Roses, the 4th of July. "Your granddaddy loved to celebrate the 4th in Belhaven; he'd been doing it since he was a little boy. Every year we would load the children up and go over to Belhaven for the parade. Afterwards we would have a picnic and then in the evening, we would watch the fireworks. One year I had just had Bugsy and was in the hospital [Pungo District hospital]. I watched the fireworks from my hospital room."

Since Lois and Hambone had gotten married and had four children, life seemed so wonderful. "Your granddaddy was so affectionate and loving; I soaked it up like a sponge." She remembers crying when he had to go to work because she missed him so much.

Her life had become that of her dreams, one filled with love and laughter. Hambone had many work opportunities to come along, but he would turn them down if they required working out of town. "He once told somebody, that if it meant leaving her and the kids, he was not interested. No amount of money could buy back the time he would lose with his family." As far as Lois and the children, they have all said they never felt "poor." When they had moved to Gaylord house, they had indoor plumbing and plenty of room, which was more than a lot of people had at the time. Lois's days had been filled by taking care of her family. She enjoyed being a mother of four: "In the mornings, I would wake the children by saying 'Wake up little rosebuds!' They'd get up,

have breakfast and go out to play, I never knew where Benny was, he roamed the neighborhood!” Lois recalls, “those were good years.”

As a child, Lois had never had a home church; she would visit several churches in Pinetown, but was never a steady member anywhere. When she and Hambone moved to the house “Up Pungo” they decided to become regular attendees at Union Grove Church of Christ. They both enjoyed going to Church, so when they moved to Terra Ceia, the family began attending Terra Ceia Church of Christ. Both Lois and Hambone felt at home with their new “church family” and were baptized and became members. All four of their children eventually were baptized in the very same church. They made many friends there, friendships that would last a lifetime. When their children were grown and had moved away and attended their own churches, they would still come once a year to “Home Coming” at Terra Ceia Church of Christ, bringing along the grandchildren. It was a day filled with church, food, fellowship and family.

When Lois’s children were just becoming teenagers, her family underwent a series of life changing events, one right behind the other. In 1966, Hambone’s father passed away. A short while later, in the summer of 1966, there was a knock at the door. A cousin had come to deliver some devastating news. “Margaret Waters came to the house and told us Bonner had been killed. He had a dispute earlier with a man he had done some work for. It had something to do with the man’s [Shelly Gurkins] brother. Bonner was picking up someone who worked for him when the man came out from across the street and shot him.” Frances remembers the events as being “horrendous, absolutely devastating; we [grandchildren] all loved him so much.” Nat had taken it pretty hard. He had left that morning in the best mood she had seen him in a long time. The doctor had to sedate Nat because she was in such distress. Nat’s soul provider for many years was gone. It wasn’t until after Bonner’s death, did Lois’s children find out that Bonner was not their mother’s



Lois & Ben (Hambone) 1966

biological father.

One year later, tragedy struck again. There was no death involved this time, but all the same, it was life changing. Hambone entered the house one day and told her he needed to go to the hospital. He had been at work and was having horrible chest pain. He would try to rest and continue on, but it had gotten unbearable. She rushed him to the hospital where he was admitted and told he was having a heart attack.

Hambone was out of work for three months. The family brought him home, where he had to remain in bed for a long period of time. “Thank goodness for some wonderful people, who helped us get through it. Our Church did all they could, various clubs and organizations came to our aid. “Your granddaddy had so many friends, a man named Zeno Ratcliff, who was a county commissioner, came to the house to see what he could do to help. He had a woman come out from Social Services to help us fill out paper work to get some help.” Times were really tough for the Rose’s. Lois’s daughter Louise says “We had asked for bicycles for Christmas, but after Daddy got sick, I remember telling them, we didn’t need bikes this year. I was so surprised when we got them. Buggy wasn’t supposed to ride hers because she had just had her appendix removed, but she did anyway.” Lois says that Hambone was so determined the children would get new bikes, that he borrowed the money to get them.



Nurse Rose

Lois had seen the situation her mother had been in with the death of Bonner, so she decided that she needed to take action to ensure that she could care for her family, in the event that Hambone was no longer able. Her neighbor Madelyn Van Gyzen convinced Lois to enter into Beaufort County Technical’s nursing assist program. “I had no training of any kind, all I knew how to do was take care of a household, I decided I better learn how to something.”

After completing the program, Lois began working at Beaufort County Hospital. “I worked there for a while and really liked it. For the first time, I wasn’t known as Hambone’s wife or Benny’s mother, but Lois the Nurse, it felt good.”

The girls I worked with talked me into going back to school to become a nurse and I did just that. It was hard, I had to study a lot, but I was always on the Dean's list." After completing the nursing program, Lois began working in the ICU at Beaufort County Hospital and says, "Those paychecks seemed mighty good." Lois worked at Beaufort County Hospital in the ICU until she retired in 1989. She is remembered by many who she worked with as "The Rose." Two of her daughters, Margaret and Louise followed in her footsteps and also became nurses. "I like to think I had a little hand in their decision to become a nurse."

For the first time, Hambone and Lois were doing well enough financially to enjoy pleasure in life they had not experienced before, like a vacation. Hambone had several episodes with his heart condition, but he was still working and they managed to get away to the Outer Banks for a week every summer. Their life was changed by Lois's financial contribution; things seemed to be getting easier. They were also about to enter into a new phase of their lives together.

Lois had accomplished much in her years. She had grown from that scared little girl, to become a wife, mother and nurse. The next phase of her life would entail more children. On March 21, 1971, her daughter Margaret and husband David became parents of her first grandchildren. Six weeks premature, twin girls, Davida Lee and Michelle Elaine were born. "They were tiny, the littlest babies I'd ever seen." Both were hanging to life, and just a few days after they were born, Michelle left this world in the arms of the Angels. Davida remained in the hospital for a few more weeks, but came home healthy and beautiful.

Nine months later, Louise and her husband Joe added another granddaughter, Jessica Rose, to Lois's growing family. Five years later, their son Benny and his wife welcomed the first grandson, Ian Benjamin followed by Jason Michael and the last grandchild, Shiloh Suzanne. The Rose Family had really bloomed! When Ian began to talk, he deemed Hambone "Big Daddy" so from that point on, they became Granny Lois and Big Daddy.

In 1989, Lois's health had gotten to a point she could no longer work. She had multiple back surgeries and other chronic illnesses that forced her into retirement at 62. Hambone had already retired, with his own health forcing him into early retirement. Several heart attacks and finally the placement of a defibrillator kept him from working. "These were truly the best years of our lives; we spent every day together, just the two of us." Lois took up painting and Hambone spent his days working in the yard. Hambone was a member of The Improved Order of Red Men. Lois and Hambone enjoyed the social functions at the Red Men's lodge and attended

dances often. He also helped with a weekly Bingo game, which was Lois's time to herself. As the years went by, Lois says, "I loved him more and more!" Their story was a true love story.

On November 22, 1990, Lois once again changed titles. She had been Hambone's wife, Mother of four, Nurse Rose, Granny Lois and finally "GG," which stands for great-grandmother. "Her granddaughter Jessica gave birth to a son, Jordan. Lois remembers, "Adelaide [Lois's sister-in-law] used to say, Jordan came into our lives when we needed a baby, and she was right, he brightened up our lives."

Jessica had two more sons, Blake in 1994 and Peyton in 2000. Lois's granddaughter Davida added another great-grandson, Jared, who was also born in 2000. At holiday gatherings the house was full of children once again. In 2008, Mallory Katherine was born, Jessica's fourth child and



Teddy, Lois, & Great-Granddaughter Mallory

Lois's last great-grandchild to date. "Sometimes when I look at their pictures I think, all these people are here on Earth because of me." Indeed, there are fourteen of us here that are very proud to be a descendant of Lois Christine Waters Rose!

Lois had experienced love like no other. She had been with her soul mate for all but the

first 17 years of her life. Hambone's heart had become too weak to hang on to this Earth. He slipped away on November 19, 1998. If it were possible to die of a broken heart, surely Lois would have gone with him. In the time after his death, Lois wrote down her thoughts in this poem.

A Lifetime Was Not Long Enough

When we were parted by the end of your life
The pain in my heart felt like it would break
We had been together for most of my life
But still a lifetime was not long enough
When we were young and so in love
Forever seemed so far away
I never thought a lifetime would not be long enough
As the years flew by and we had our babies
So sweet, so full life was
Death seemed so far away
I never thought a lifetime was not long enough
When you were a young man, death came so close
I cried and prayed, Please God
A lifetime is not long enough
He spared your life and the years went by
Our Children grew up with life's ups and downs
Our love held fast
I rarely thought about a lifetime not being long enough
But the years brought changes as time passed by
Often I thought,
A lifetime is not long enough to tell you
I love you and please don't leave me behind
But here I am, waiting to go and be with you
One day we will have an eternal lifetime
And at last, it will be long enough

Eleven years have passed since Lois wrote this poem. Her health has become a constant issue. She has Lupus and is losing her eyesight. She is no longer able to drive, so her days are spent at home with her little dog, a Bichon Frise named Teddy. Hambone is no longer there to shower her with affection, and she misses him dearly, but Teddy has been a great companion to help her pass the time as she waits patiently to be reunited with the love of her life. She has always had a

passion for reading, but her eyesight has made that very difficult, so she has to settle for a good “Andy Griffin” show with Teddy curled up by her side.

Lois is loved dearly by so many; her four children, five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. Though her sister Jean has passed away, she still has her brother Steve, who visits her weekly. She has several nieces who adore their “Aunt Lois.” All of her children grew up to be very successful adults, with good careers. Her grandchildren are also very successful, and it appears that her great-grandchildren are going to be as well. She set a good example, and we have all reaped the benefits.

She has been my grandmother, my role model and most importantly, the person who showed me what love looked like, as I watched the way she and my granddaddy deeply loved one another. For her I will forever be grateful, as is the rest of our family, for loving us, and inspiring us to love deeply in return.

I asked her if she could tell that little timid girl, who sometimes felt unloved and alone, anything she wanted, what would she tell her.... ”I would tell her, hang on, life will get so much better. One day everything will be Rosey!”

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This course introduces the distinctive features of a particular culture. Topics include art, history, music, literature, politics, philosophy, and religion. Upon completion, students should be able to appreciate the unique character of the study culture. This course has been approved to satisfy the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement general education core requirement in humanities/fine arts.

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