

# LIFE

## on the Family

Preserving North Carolina's Coastal Heritage Through Oral Histories

2011



A Publication of  
Beaufort County Community College





LIFE ON THE PAMLICO

2011 Issue

HUM 120 Cultural Studies

Edited by Bryan A. Oesterreich

Designed by James E. Casey

Copy-Edited by Beth S. Casey

[www.beaufortccc.edu/lotp](http://www.beaufortccc.edu/lotp)

## Designer's Note

Welcome to the 2011 issue of *Life on the Pamlico*, the second edition of our new online, digital format. When Bryan Oesterreich and I first discussed a redesign of the LOTP publication, we had only begun to realize the possibilities that a purely digital format would afford.

It is a paradox of sorts, in that technologies so thoroughly alien to many of the subjects here, have become such an asset in preserving these glimpses of the past. With this edition, we have reproduced not only images of the people profiled here but also some of the documents—records of marriage, employment, publications—which serve to flesh out the lives chronicled in these pages.

As a design principle, we have tried to balance a modern, magazine-style layout with the vintage aesthetic of a shoebox full of old photos, spread out on the kitchen table.

But above all, the varied experiences sketched out here, whether of profound hardships or manifest joys, speak together of a complex past that we would do well not only to remember but also to celebrate: the rich culture of *Life on the Pamlico*.

James E. Casey



# Contents



<i>Designer's Note</i>	iii
Shirley Jean Roberson <i>Charlotte Simpson</i>	i
Jessie Moore <i>Amber Stephenson</i>	7
Betty Roebuck Harris <i>Lashawnda Howard</i>	12
Henrietta "Mudduck" Gorham <i>Kenneth Worsley</i>	19
Linda McGhee Woolard <i>Karen Harris</i>	25
Mary Jane Oden <i>Sarah Luberisse</i>	31
Donald Spencer <i>Forrest Howell</i>	37
Mary Ann Johnson <i>SheQuonia Stanley</i>	42
Lynda Leigh Williams Woolard <i>Kimberly Woolard</i>	48
Curtis L. Burroughs <i>Madison Harrell</i>	54
Carrie Godley-Thomas <i>Camille Godley</i>	62



# Shirley Jean Roberson

*What's Mine is Yours*

Charlotte Simpson

*T*his article is derived from the life experiences of my mother, Shirley Jean Roberson Simpson. I would like to express what an honor it is to be able to document the history of such a wonderful individual, and her life in Eastern North Carolina.

Shirley Jean Roberson was born January 21, 1938, to Mrs. Bettie Jane Coltrain Roberson and her husband William Wiley Roberson, Sr. When Jean was born, she already had seven older sisters and five older brothers. She was the thirteenth child with nine more to follow. All together there were eleven daughters and eleven sons born to the Roberson family. One can only imagine the bonds that this immense family group shared. They still continue the family tradition of a Roberson Family



*Shirley Jean Roberson*

Reunion every year in Williamston, Martin County, North Carolina.

The Robersons were farmers in an area called Poplar Point in Hamilton, North Carolina. This area is now called Fort Branch. They farmed tobacco, peanuts, sweet potatoes, and other crops and grew vegetables and fruits. They tended pigs, chickens, and cows to butcher for meat, as well

as fresh eggs and milk. Life on a farm could not have been an easy one. When I asked Jean how her family managed with such a large number of children, she said, "Work was just a part of life. We'd all help each other and things would get done." The children would even help other farmers with their crops. Sometimes, they would get paid and be treated to a five-cent Pepsi cola and a five-cent honey bun.

Jean speaks with great joy and pride as she describes how she and her siblings used to help their parents work their farm and grow and prepare their own food: "Today, not too many people store their fresh picked foods in canning jars. We canned string beans, tomatoes, peppers, okra, peaches, and pears: whatever was in season. We made our own jams and jellies, and churned our own butter and cheese also," she said.

As Jean explains the rhythm of a typical day during her childhood years, it brought to my mind, the saying, "We do more before breakfast than most people do all day long!" Jean and her siblings would start each day with making their beds up and changing into work clothes. First, the cook stove would need fresh fire wood to start breakfast; then, they would gather eggs from the chickens, milk the cows, and water the animals and the garden. During school months, they would take care of their morning chores before washing up and changing into school clothes. Then, they would pack lunches and help their mother prepare breakfast.

Now breakfast, just like all meals in the Roberson home, would practically be a feast. Jean recalls a typical breakfast menu: "Momma would make two big sheet pans of biscuits, fried sausage and bacon, about a dozen eggs, and a large jar or two of peaches. Some mornings, she would make flap jacks with a pot of hot chocolate syrup to pour over them." After breakfast, they would all help clean the kitchen, wash dishes, and finish getting ready for school.

While waiting for the school bus, Jean and her brothers and sisters would play games such as doodle-bug, ring-around-the-roses, hop-scotch, and kick-the-can.

During my interview with Jean, I was amazed at how well she remembered most of her school teacher's names. Jean said, "I remember Mr. Haislip was our principal, and there was Mrs. Beech, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Stokes, Mrs. Mildred Edwards, Mrs. Edna Everett, and Mrs. Copeland." Jean also explained how after school, usually on Fridays, one or two of their friends would get off the bus at their house. Jean said, "Our friends must have really loved Momma's cooking. They would even help us with our chores. I'm sure momma would notice the extras at the dinner table, but it seemed there was always room



*Jean's Parents*

for one more."

Jean describes a typical dinner, "We would help momma prepare two chickens for frying, peel five pounds of potatoes to boil and mash, boil a big pot of snapped string beans, bake a dozen sweet potatoes, and mix up a deep dish of baked corn bread. Jean remembers there wasn't much time during the school months for extracurricular activities. Even in the winter months, the Roberson farm stayed busy with tending the livestock and preparing the land and equipment for planting season. "Those days, everyone looked out for one another. If we needed help putting-in a barn of tobacco, our neighbors would lend a hand. If our neighbors needed some extra sugar, we



gave it to them. 'What's mine is yours,' was our motto," Jean said.

One year, a family of five had their home destroyed by fire. Mr. and Mrs. Roberson welcomed the family into their home until other arrangements could be made. Jean remembers how they spread blankets on the floor and all the children "camped in." She recalls the fun they had with their new, temporary family members.

Jean's permanent family members would arrive, one about every 14-16 months. She recalls how when it was about time for her mother to give birth, the children would all stay overnight with cousins or older siblings. When they returned home, they would have another new baby brother or sister. "It seemed there was always a birthday party, or a wedding, or some celebration going on at our home," Jean said. "It was said that Momma couldn't make a cake or a pie, but six cakes and four pies she could make with her eyes shut."

As I interviewed Jean, I still couldn't fathom the complexity of so many children in one family. I asked her how they all got along with one another. She said that they all worked together, played together, and helped each other. They were taught manners and respect. "My Daddy always told us: 'Don't lie, don't steal, mind your manners, do what adults tell you to do, and don't say anything about someone that you

wouldn't say to their face.'" Jean added, "We usually kept each other out of trouble, not in trouble."

When they were old enough to go out on dates, they would pile as many as they could into one car; brothers and sisters and cousins and friends. "We had to be home by nine," Jean said. "Now-a-days the party doesn't start until nine." She recalled how they would sit out in the car as long as they could until her father opened the door and said, "Ya'll gonna sit out there all night?" "We knew what that meant," Jean said.

On the weekends, after the work was finished for the day, Jean and her siblings, cousins and friends would go to Beddard's Store in Poplar Point and play checkers. This is where Jean met Gilbert "Mac" McDelmer Simpson, her husband-to-be. She saw him and his cousin playing a game of checkers and jokingly commented that she would let the winner take her home. "The rumor was, Mac had paid

his cousin twenty-five cents to let him win the game," Jean said.

Jean recalls how Mac loved to play his guitar. "He used to come over to my house and play his guitar, and we would all sit out on the front porch and listen to him and momma play," Jean said. Jean's mother, Betty Jane, could play many instruments: the banjo, guitar, Jews' harp, and accordion, just to name a few. "We would pick a song to sing, and they would play it," Jean said.

*"Those days, everyone looked out for one another. If we needed help putting in a barn of tobacco, our neighbors would lend a hand. If our neighbors needed some extra sugar, we gave it to them. What's mine is yours, was our motto."*

Jean's family wasn't a strict religious family, but she does remember attending the Christian Church in Hamilton, North Carolina. Jean laughed to herself as she said, "Getting ready for church was like going through an assembly line, with Momma washing and Daddy drying. The older children would help the younger ones get dressed, and then we would sit quietly until it was time to put on our hats and go to church."

With no indoor plumbing, bathing was a chore by itself. The children would carry the water from the hand pump out in the yard to a big black pot heating on the cook stove. "I remember we had several big black pots," Jean said. The Robersons were a "can-do" family. They even made their own soap using animal fat and lye.

Jean is no stranger to work. She has worked hard and consistently throughout her life. She expresses her gratitude towards her parents and siblings and other family members. Jean said, "I'm glad I learned how to work well with others and be consistent." When Jean was about fifteen years old, she went to work at The Central Restaurant in Williamston. She was only eighteen years old when she and Mac married on June

23, 1956. Mac served four years in the United States Air Force and was stationed in Virginia, Georgia, Florida, and overseas in Germany.

It was hard for Jean with Mac being away for long periods of time, but she managed to stay busy.

When The Central Restaurant in Williamston closed, Jean moved to Elizabeth City and worked for the same company, The Central Restaurant, in Elizabeth City. She also worked at The Carolina Coffee Shop in Elizabeth City. While working for the Professional Home Nursing Care Company out of Wilson, North Carolina, Jean would travel wherever she was needed to care for individuals in their own homes.

After the Air Force, Jean's husband, Mac,

landed a welding job in the maintenance department at the Weyerhaeuser paper mill, in Plymouth, North Carolina. While living in Plymouth, Jean waitressed at Harden's Restaurant, the Pine Tree Restaurant, and the Ye Ole Lodge Restaurant, respectively, until they each had closed their businesses. "I was never fired nor quit a job," Jean said.



*Jean & Mac*

Jean and Mac have four daughters—Debra Darlene, Phyllis Jean, Donna Lynn, and Charlotte Yvonne—and two sons—Johnny Mac and Timothy O'Neal. Her second son was born just as Neil Armstrong was landing on the moon, July 20, 1969, hence the name Neal.

Being a mother of six children, there was always something happening to keep Jean alert. She recalls how one of her daughters suffered a concussion and was hospitalized and in a coma for seven days. Another daughter broke her arm climbing on the swing set. One of her sons was accidentally hit between the eyes with an ax by a friend chopping wood, and there was even a dog bite to the jaw of her

youngest daughter that needed eight stitches. “It's a good thing we lived so close to the hospital,” Jean said. I admire Jean's resilience. She stated how she had to rely on her faith to pull her through many incidents and how she holds firm to her beliefs in God and

The Bible. Her favorite passage states, “This too shall pass.” With love and persistence, Jean has always given her all. To date, Jean has five granddaughters and two grandsons which she tries to spoil with her love.

After her husband, Mac, passed in 1999, Jean settled in Williamston, North Carolina, just down the road from the area where she grew up on her family's

farm. Currently, Jean is an honorable member of The First Pentecostal Holiness Church in Williamston, and is active in The Women's Church Ministries helping to raise money by serving dinners and making holiday treats. The money raised goes to a home in Greenville for unwed mothers. Jean is also a partner in the ministry of Lifeline radio station in Williamston. As a member of the Rainbow Ministries with Evangelist Deloris Staton, Jean meets weekly with “women of all colors united in the word,” Jean said. Jean also participates in the Meals-on-Wheels program by delivering meals to elderly individuals. “It is incredibly honorable to help those who need extra care. Some

days, all a person needs is for someone to show them how important they are by sharing time with them,” Jean said.

Jean is always willing to share her time and resources with others. She loves to sew quilts and

crochet afghans. A member of the Arts and Crafts Guild, Jean

is known among her friends as “The Crochet Lady,” and often donates afghans or lap quilts to individuals in nursing homes or hospitals. She also donates her blood to the American Red Cross every time she is able and is a registered organ donor(which she recommends everyone becoming.) “You never know how you might help someone,” she says.



*Jean's Children*



Shirley Jean Roberson is the 13-year old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Will Roberson and lives in Hamilton, Martin County. Shirley is a happy little girl and has a right to be because she has nineteen brothers and sisters. She is very proud of her fine family and, as evidence of this, recently wrote a poem which has been passed on to us by George S. Haislip, principal of the Hamilton school. Here it is:

### **My Family**

My mother's name is Janie,  
My daddy's name is Will,  
My little sister is Barbara  
And my brother's name is Bill.

There are Jerry and Grady,  
Jimmy and Charlie,  
Maudy Pearl, Betty Lou,  
Frances and Polly.

There are Russell and Bennie,  
Mickey and O'Dell,  
Daisy, Allie Marie, Janie Ruth  
And also Annie Bell.

And that isn't all;  
There is one I have left;  
He's my strong, big brother,  
And his name is Zeph.

That list is a long one,  
But if you count them you'll see,  
There is still one that's left,  
And that one is me.



*The poem above was written by Jean when she was thirteen years old. Her poem was entered into a writing contest held by The State magazine (now Our State) in 1951 and won.*



# Jessie Moore

*I have enjoyed my life.*

Amber Stephenson

Before my first interview with Jessie Moore, who is my grandfather, I had called him to tell him that I would be interviewing him for a school paper. By the time that I made it to his house, he had already found some papers that he had written about his life. Jessie is a very intelligent man who enjoys spending time with his family and friends. He is a hard worker on anything that he put his mind to. There isn't a task that he couldn't complete without a little help. He is a dedicated deacon, who never misses a Sunday, and also a great grandfather to his many grandchildren, with whom he enjoys spending time.

Jessie Moore was born November 27, 1929, to Jacob Moore and Matilda Jane Moore. He was born in Blounts Creek in a three bedroom house by a midwife who was his father's oldest sister. The house that he grew up in was located on his family farm that he would later take over. Their house was made out of wood and was painted white. The house had no indoor plumbing back then in the 1920's. It also had wood

plank floors that were brown. The family cooked all their food on a wood stove and used a wood heater to stay warm during the winter months.

Jacob and Matilda Moore gave birth to two sets of twins and one girl. The first set of twins was born in December of 1927, Randolph and Essie Mae Moore. Jessie and his twin sister Bessie were born in November of 1929. His last sister, Neopolia was born in January 1935. "I couldn't say my childhood was full of great material items, but I can say I had a good childhood full of work to help support my family."

Jessie and his siblings each had to pitch in around their father's two farms when they became old enough. When Jessie was very young, his oldest sister Essie Mae was in charge of maintaining the family garden and caring for her younger siblings. Their garden at the family home had corn, collards, and beans. About a mile up the road was their other family farm, where they grew three to four acres of clay peas. Clay peas were a very small bean that looked similar to

black-eyed peas. Jessie's father, Jacob, used to allow people to pick their own clay peas by the half. Picking by the half meant that whatever the person picked, they had to give Jacob his half.

Around 1937, Jessie's father started to plant tobacco. Jessie was able to work in the tobacco field when he wasn't attending school. He used to have to prime the tobacco from the bottom as it ripened, and take it to the shelter where his mother and other women used tobacco cotton to tie the tobacco together. Then the tobacco was hauled back to the family house where the tobacco barn was located. Jessie remembers walking with his father through the woods to where more tobacco was raised. "There was a small bed for me to lie on, made of sacks and wood planks," he said laughing.

Not only did he tend to tobacco, he also was responsible for ten hogs. On a daily basis, he had to feed them and give them water. When winter arrived, Jessie's father and other community farmers would come together to kill four of their hogs. He was known for hitting the hogs "one good time" to kill them. There was a big barrel that was used to store the hog meat while it was salted out. Once the hog meat was "salt struck" it was then taken to a smoke house to be smoked out to preserve it. The pig head, back bone, and side meat (ribs) weren't salted. The remaining parts of the pig were used to make lard for cooking purposes. Also, cracklings were made out of

the hog underbelly that was cut up into small pieces and placed in a large cooking pot. The cracklings were cooked until all the fat was gone; the meat was then taken to a presser to release the extra grease. They could be eaten with eggs, sweet potatoes, or as a side meat.

Jessie's early life was not just based on farm work, he and his other siblings had the privilege to attend public school. Jessie attended Ware Creek School in 1935 on a daily basis. He had to do some of his daily chores of feeding the animals before he went to school. After school, he would have to chop wood before he was able to eat dinner. Ware Creek School was an all-black school that started with the first grade and ended with the eighth grade. He attended every grade they offered. After Jessie had completed the eighth grade, he went on to Aurora high school for two years. He had to walk about one and a half miles to and from school every day.

As my granddaddy told me about his school times, he brought up one of his principals, Mr. Spellman. Mr. Spellman was known to be a very strict principal that later passed. My granddaddy still had the program that told all about Mr. Spellman's life. Also, he mentioned Ms. Betty Moore, who used to stay in Washington. Jessie said "Ms. Betty was one of his father's kin-folk." The last teacher that he spoke of was Ms. Tripp Edward. She taught him his ABC's, how to write, and how to figure out simple math problems.

*Clay peas were a very small bean that looked similar to black-eyed peas. Jessie's father, Jacob, used to allow people to pick their own clay peas by the half. Picking by the half meant that whatever the person picked, they had to give Jacob his half.*

I can say that he paid attention in class very well. At the age of 81, he can still spell very well—better than me.

In 1950, right out of the tenth grade, Jessie was drafted into the U.S. Army. He wasn't ready for the military life, but he had no other choice but to go. The first six months that he was gone he trained at Fort Lenerwood, Missouri, to drive heavy equipment. He went overseas to the Korean War as a truck driver, as a 13th engineer, 7th division. While he was in Korea driving trucks one day, transporting soldiers up to T-bone hill, the brakes had frozen up on the way down. "It was a steep mountain. I saw that I couldn't stop, so I ran the truck into the side of the mountain, straight over the cliff." He stayed in the Korean War for a year and half before returning home.

Jesse returned back to his family farm to help his father Jacob. After coming back, he helped his father on the farm for about two years. Then he moved to Virginia to work construction on the highways for another two years. Then he realized he missed home, so he decided to return.

When he came back home, he took over the responsibility of raising hogs, turkeys, and geese. Around 1956-1957, Jesse sold turkeys at the farmer's market every week. Jesse said that his geese were "raised with the chickens, and once the chickens laid

their eggs, the geese would sit on them until they hatched. Also they would raise the baby chicks with their own."

In 1958, Texasgulf, a major phosphate plant, came to Aurora, and he started working there on third shift. Some years later, he got promoted to the paint shop. There he painted trucks and steel. He really enjoyed working there and meeting new people. He stayed at that phosphate plant until he retired.

On February 3, 1963, he married the love of his

life, my grandmother, Emily W. Keys, who had five children. They met each other through Jesse's uncle Joe Keys. Later that year, in June, he lost his oldest brother Randolph, who died from pneumonia. This happened when he was on his way to his uncle Tiny's house to yield some tobacco, and that was the last year that Jesse tended tobacco.

After they got married, they lived on Core Point Road in a six-

room house. This house

consisted of a kitchen, a living room, a den, and three bedrooms. The house had electricity, and it had a refrigerator, a gas stove, and a wood heater. There was no indoor plumbing, but there was an outhouse. After using the wood heater, they soon advanced to an electric heater. The gas stove heated the kitchen and the nearest room, and the last two rooms were heated by the electric heater.



*Jessie and Emily*

In June of 1964, Emily gave birth to their first child, Patrick Moore. A year later they added another room to the house so that it had five rooms altogether. Also that year, they remodeled the kitchen with cabinets. Then in 1967 Emily gave birth to their second son, Jeffery Moore.

With the job at Texasgulf, Jesse was able to send his children to S.W. Snowden School. During the 70s, he participated in the Boys Scouts at the American Legion. The children attended S. W. Snowden and later continued on to Aurora High.

While still working at Texasgulf, Jesse worked on building his wife another house. The house was under construction on Maule Point Road. It was to have four bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen area with a dining space, a carport, a fireplace, and a back porch.

The house was built out of concrete blocks and vinyl siding. During 1977, while their new house was being built, Jesse lost his sister Essie Mae to pneumonia. That was a sad time for him. He moved into his new house in December 1979. He and His wife Emily, always cooked with a gas

stove. "Gas is just as cheap as using electricity, My gas bill runs less than my electric bill does on a monthly basis," he says.

In 1982 Jesse lost his mother to diabetes. She had suffered a long life of trying to control her sugar on a daily basis. Before she passed away, she had already had one of her legs amputated. Diabetes is a

common disease that has traveled from one person to another within his family.

Jesse and his wife had one acre of field where they both shared the responsibility of planting a garden year around. They grew corn, squash, beans, watermelon, cucumbers, and collards. Not only did they grow fruits and vegetables, they had fruit trees that bore figs, apples, peaches, and plums. The food that was planted was shared among family and friends who lived nearby. Emily even canned most of their fruits and vegetables to preserve them for the off seasons. Jesse also had almost another acre of land about one-tenth of a mile from his house that he used to plant crops on.

In addition to Jesse losing his mother, he suffered another tragedy in his life during the year

1993. His father passed away from an unknown cause. He continues on in life with only his twin sibling Bessie left. Jesse was always known to make sure that she had everything that she needed from food to keeping her yard mowed.

In 2002, Jesse started making some changes

to their house. Their carport was closed in, painted, and reconstructed into another sitting room that would lead into the main house. He also closed in the back porch to protect his deep freezers and to allow his wife to have a place to iron and have time for herself.



*Jesse and Bessie at Their Birthday Party*



Jessie was a very active guy. All he knew of was farm work day in and day out. He told me that when he did have a little time to himself, he would walk around his house, play baseball, exercise or even ride his bike. Some of his hobbies were fishing, hunting deer, rabbit, or raccoon. "Raccoon is the best meat to eat. They eat their food clean." Jessie often had a family cookout once or twice during the summer. All his children and grandchildren would gather and have hours of laughter.

When I asked Jesse about the church that he has belonged to since he was a young child, I was surprised to hear that it is the same church that he still goes to today - St. Frances. He called out different Pastor's names who used to preach at the church over the many years. Jesse used to usher for three years before taking a break. He was later on the trustee board where he was in charge of making sure that the welfare of the church was taken care of. If there was any painting or repairs to be done, he was the one who was there to make sure everything was presentable for church by that upcoming Sunday. He attended Sunday school faithfully, and he was put on trial for the deacon's board for two years. From 1987 till the present, he has been the chairman of the deacon's board. That meant more responsibilities for business, and church programs.

As we continued talking about church, he pulled out some old Bible questionnaires that he had filled out for different church conferences. He also had a piece of paper that listed many chapters out

of the Bible. Before I knew it, Jesse was just calling out some of his favorite bible verses starting with the Old Testament Psalm 24, Psalm 1, and moving on into the New Testament of 1 John 14:1. He then told me about the four gospels of Mark, Luke, John, and Matthew. Jesse kept calling out scriptures that he could remember without opening his bible; before I knew it

fifteen minutes had passed, so I told him that I couldn't put the whole

bible in my story.

Jessie has had a wonderful life full of many opportunities, and he is still seen as an intelligent man to everyone who knows him. He has spent most of his life working hard to provide for his family. He is a man who has learned how life was by having to work on a farm as a young child. Up till this day, he continues to set out a garden full of vegetables on a yearly basis, even though his age is causing him to slow down just a little. Jessie has been a dedicated person to his family, friends, and anything that he set his mind out to do. Jessie said, "Overall, I have enjoyed my life and pray to God that I see many more years".



*Emily at the Table By Herself*

# Betty Roebuck Harris

*The Loving Mrs. Betty*

Lashawnda Howard

When I think of Mrs. Betty, I think of a spirit-filled, loving, warm person, who knows how to keep the laughter going. The day I asked Mrs. Betty if I could write about her life, I think that was the only time I have seen her without anything to say. She looked at me and said, "Why do you want to do that for?" I said because you are just a wonderful person, and I feel you have a great story to tell. She paused for a few minutes, then said, "Ok then, when do you want to get started?" I looked at her and said, "Whenever you would like." That Friday, the memories began to flow.

Mrs. Betty was born Betty Roebuck on March 12, 1950, in the living room of her mother and father's home in Parmale, Martin County. Mrs. Betty's mother



*Betty at Six*

and father's names were Mary Magdalene Jones Roebuck and Calbert Curtis Roebuck. She has two brothers and two sisters -James, William, Judy R. Dail and Mary R. Bunting.

At the age of six, Mrs. Betty said, "Because I was so hard headed my brother stabbed me in the leg with a pitch fork." Her mother kept telling her to stay out of her brother William's way while he fed the cows and the horses. Due to the fact that she was stubborn and did what she wanted, she continued to play with her dolls close to the hay stacks. When her brother swung back from throwing the cow some hay, instead of him getting more hay, he stabbed Mrs. Betty in the leg. She said, "Blood was everywhere and I was crying." Her mother put her up on the side of the water pump

and washed her leg until the blood stopped. Later on, her father took her to the doctor in Bethel to get stitches. Mrs. Betty said, "I can remember coming home thinking I was cool for having a great big bandage on my leg." The lesson that Mrs. Betty said she learned was to "listen to what your parents say."

When she turned seven years old, the Roebuck family moved to the main part of Greenville called Meadow Brook. That's where Mrs. Betty attended 3rd Street School along with her childhood friend Linda May Martin. Mrs. Betty said, "The one teacher that I will never forget will have to be Mrs. Perkins because she was the first teacher that ever spanked me in front of the class." While in grade school, Mrs. Betty was a part of the hall monitor and the glee club in grades forth through sixth. In the sixth grade, she had her moment to shine when she had to sing a special solo at one of the glee clubs concerts. The name of the special solo was "Bless This House."

Back when Mrs. Betty was going to school, they had this event called May Day. On May Day, the teacher told the class to sit under a tree. The teacher also told the class not to touch the tree because it was poison ivy. Since Mrs. Betty was a dare devil, she touched the tree, and the next day she was broken out from head to toe and swollen. Her mom doctored her up and then spanked her for touching the tree. "Don't dare me or double dare me," said Mrs. Betty.

When it came time to talk about boyfriends in grade school, it was like Mrs. Betty was reliving those moments all over again. She said, "My very first boyfriend was when I was in the 4th grade, and his name was Frankie Harrington." Frankie was the first

boy to give her a kiss and also a friendship ring. According to Mrs. Betty, Frankie was a good looking guy.

When it came to talking about her first love, Terry Sutton was the first name that came up. They spent time together mostly at church functions such as church picnics and church services. But Mrs. Betty said, "Terry had a temper on him." Terry had always told her that if they ever broke up, that he would kill himself.

On June 2nd, Mrs. Betty got off the school bus and got in the car with Terry. He had gotten mad at her for some reason, and he turned to her and said, "Let's see how many stop signs we can make it through." They made it through the first stop sign, but the second stop sign they didn't make it. They were in an accident that left Mrs. Betty in the hospital for eight days. That was the day that they broke up.

At the age of thirteen, Mrs. Betty met her future husband Bobby Harris. She said, "I knew at first sight that he was going to be the one that I would marry." Even though Terry was her first love, she knew deep down that Bobby was going to be the one that she married. Mrs. Betty first met Bobby at church through his sister Mary Lou. She and Mrs. Betty became very good friends. Almost every Sunday, Mrs. Betty was over at Mary Lou's house for Sunday dinner just to get close to Bobby. That stopped soon because he would always leave in his car with his friends around dinner time. Bobby was three years older than Mrs. Betty, so he was old enough to drive. Bobby didn't really pay that much attention to Mrs. Betty because he thought she was a kid. But things



*Betty at Seven.*

started to change as time went on and Mrs. Betty got older.

At the age of sixteen, Mrs. Betty said that Mary Lou would tell her different things that Bobby would say about her. Bobby told his sister that Betty was starting to look pretty good or he would say Betty's not acting so childish.

Also at the age of sixteen, Mrs. Betty had her first job as a nurse's aid at Pitt County Memorial Hospital in Greenville, North Carolina. She told me that she had gotten the job through a program called ITC (individual training courses). The program was set up for students who went to school in the morning, and after lunch they went to work. Mrs. Betty's job required her to be at work Monday through Friday from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., and every other Saturday and Sunday from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. She only got paid once a month

Mrs. Betty said her daily task at work was changing sheets, cleaning up patients if they needed it, taking blood pressure, pulse temperatures and check their IV's to make sure the blood was flowing or dripping out the correct amounts of medicine. She also said that she ran errands for the nurses and the doctors that were on another floor. Mrs. Betty said that she worked at the hospital for the next three years, and she said that she enjoyed every moment of it.

Once Mrs. Betty turned eighteen years old, she decided to move out of her parent's house because there was some conflict going on, so she moved into

the nurse's aide dorms. The dorm was for people who work at the hospital such as single doctors, nurses, and of course, nurses aides. The dorms were located behind the hospital, and the cost to live in these dorms was only ten dollars a month. Mrs. Betty said, "Couldn't beat that." But moving out of her parent's house didn't last long at all. Mrs. Betty lived in the dorms for only two weeks.

Mrs. Betty said that on Easter morning her father came to her dorm and asked her if she could go to church with the family for Easter Sunday service. She said that she told her father that she didn't have

anything to wear. As soon as she said that, her father handed her a dress that Mrs. Betty's mother stayed up all night working on so that she would have something to wear to church on Easter Sunday. Mrs. Betty said, "I guess they were real sure I was gonna go." Her father began to cry and pleaded for her to come back home, but Mrs. Betty told her father, "If I come back home things have to change and that I'll think about it." So Mrs. Betty did go to church with her family, and the middle of the following week, she decided to move back home with her family. When she went back home, she decided to go back to school and finish the classes that she had missed and also try to work every day which she said was very hard to do.



*Betty at Sixteen-*



As the years went by, Bobby was drafted in to the army. He wrote Mrs. Betty a letter asking her the next time he came home, could he take her out on a date. Mrs. Betty said she never responded to his letter. Bobby thought Mrs. Betty didn't care, so he never wrote back to her. Bobby had gotten orders that he had to go over to Vietnam in September, 1968, but he got to go home for a month and a half before being sent over to the war.

While he was home, the church they all attended had a church outing to go to Cliffs of the Neuse (the lake). Mrs. Betty decided to ask Bobby to be her date to the outing, and to her surprise, Bobby agreed. When the outing was almost over, Mrs. Betty and Bobby were walking back to the bus, and they decided to go down a path. As they were walking, Mrs. Betty said that Bobby stopped her and turned toward her and kissed her. To Bobby's surprise, he didn't know that Mrs. Betty could kiss the way that she did.

So Bobby and Mrs. Betty kissed again.

After the kiss, Bobby asked her out on a date the next night. She said yes, and from that day on Mrs. Betty and Bobby dated until it was time for Bobby to go over to Vietnam to fight in the war. Bobby was gone for one year. When he returned home, it was three weeks before the couple starting dating again.

On December 14, 1969, Bobby and Mrs. Betty decided to get married. She said, "I told my mother on a Wednesday night we were getting married Sunday at church, so we only had three days to get everything

ready." The only way that Mrs. Betty could marry Bobby was that Bobby had to promise Mrs. Betty's father that she would graduate from high school. Bobby honored her father and made sure that she graduated.

On that Thursday, the flowers were ordered and they only cost \$25.00. The material for her dress was bought on that Thursday. Before she went to school on a Friday, the lady down the street took her

measurements and by the time Mrs. Betty had got home from school, her dress was finished.

That Sunday during morning service, the preacher announced in church that there was going to be a wedding at 3:00 p.m. and everyone was invited. Seventy-five people showed up to the wedding. After the wedding, the new couple went to New Bern to the Holiday Inn for their honeymoon. They had a steak dinner and watched the Jackson Five's first appearance on the Ed Sullivan show.

After getting married, the couple worked job after job to make ends meet. Bobby had gotten out of the service because he said, "one trip over to Vietnam was enough." Mrs. Betty said, "Bobby was really miserable. I knew what was wrong with him. He wanted to go back into the service, but he didn't want to go back to Vietnam. So he kept waiting and hoping that the war would end soon."

On December 14, 1971, Bobby and Mrs. Betty's first son was born. His name was Bobby Glenn Harris Jr. "That was a very exciting day for us," she said.

*After the wedding, the new couple went to New Bern to the Holiday Inn for their honeymoon. They had a steak dinner and watched the Jackson Five's first appearance on the Ed Sullivan show.*

In May 1974, Bobby decided to go back into the army. He was sent to Fort Jackson in South Carolina for boot camp. Then after boot camp, he was stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Mrs. Betty said it wasn't hard for Bobby to move so far away because his father was in the Air Force, and they moved all the time. For Mrs. Betty it wasn't that easy.

She had only lived in one spot, and that was North Carolina. She said, "It was scary and exciting all at the same time." When they packed the U-haul trailer and started on their journey, she said, "It felt like they were going on the other side of the earth," because it took them so long to get to Kentucky.

Back in 1974, it was only a two lane road all the way through the mountains, and it took them eighteen hours to get there. They lived in a house 32 miles from the base and 15 miles away from downtown Louisville. After the family had moved in, Bobby had to go in the field for training and Mrs. Betty was left at home with their three year old son. She was new to town and didn't know anyone or where anything was. But after two weeks, Mrs. Betty learned the area. She said, "You'll learn fast."

On September 9, 1975, Gregory Wayne Harris, Bobby and Mrs. Betty's second son was born. "Even though our first son was born in Greenville, North Carolina, and our second son was born in the Ireland Army Hospital, Fort Knox, Kentucky, they both grew up in the military life," she said.

But as the couple was welcoming in a new addition to the family, it was time to move again to Germany where Bobby was being sent. Mrs. Betty said, "I remember the night I found out my husband was going to Germany." Bobby had known for some time, but he was waiting for the right time to tell her. The way she found out about the move to Germany

was that they were over at a friend's house playing cards and Bobby's army friend slipped and said something about the order to Germany. Bobby couldn't keep his friend quiet, and after a while, Mrs. Betty caught on and started asking questions. So Bobby just finally told her the rest of what was going on.

Mrs. Betty cried and begged and pleaded with Bobby not to go. She told him that she didn't want to go and asked if he could get out of it. He kind of laughed and said,

"Betty, you don't have to go, but I do." He also said, "I have orders that say I have to go." She then asked Bobby how long would he be over there. He said, "Three years." She cried some more. She then asked him how long would he be gone if she and the family went with him, and he said, "Two and a half years." Then, like the time before, she cried. She thought about her family and being away from them so long, but then she realized that Bobby and her boys were her family, so she decided to go. Mrs. Betty said she thought, "Man, I'm gonna be going to another planet."



*Mr. & Mrs. Harris*

As Mrs. Betty talked and thought, she said, “Now I’m a girl that’s never been outside of Greenville, NC, never been on a plane, never had to do a lot of things on my own, but let me tell you, I grew up fast.”

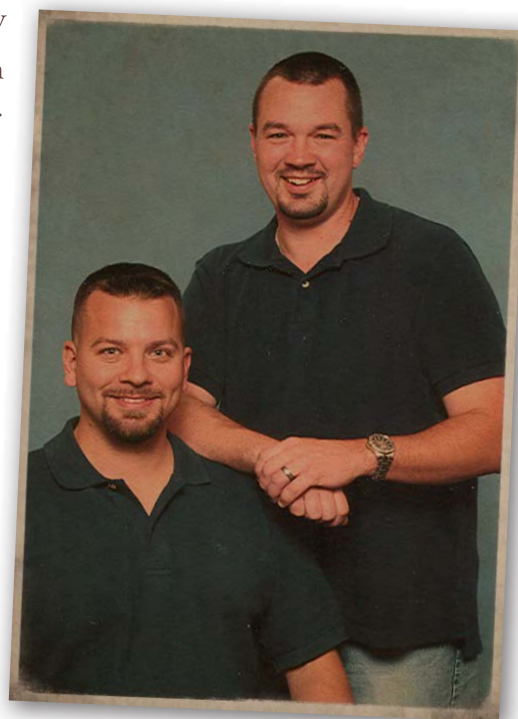
In June 1976, the Harris family’s things were packed up, and they didn’t get to see their things again until December 1976 because they were being shipped over to Germany. Bobby left for Germany in July 1976, and Mrs. Betty and her boys left for Germany in November 1976. Glen, the oldest son, was four years old, and Greg the youngest son was fourteen months old.

“The city that I lived in was called Schweinfurt, Germany,” she said. “Leaving my family was a hard thing to do but heading to a new country that I had never been to was wonderful.” Mrs. Betty’s view of Germany was very different from the way things are in the United States. Germany to her was clean and beautiful. The food and the wine were fabulous and the people were very kind. She said, “They went on marches, saw a lot of cattle, rode on cobblestones roads and went to their Oktoberfest.” Mrs. Betty said, “There’s so much to tell and not enough space.”

In July, 1979, Bobby’s time in Germany was over, and the family returned to the United States back to Fort Knox, Kentucky. Within two years, Bobby got orders again to go back to Germany, but he turned those orders down and became a Drill Sergeant for three years. After that duty was up, he received

orders for Korea in December 1982 to December 1983. But this time, Mrs. Betty stayed home with her two sons in Kentucky. She said, “That was really rough. It was like having two complete households, and one paycheck.” While Bobby was over in Korea, he lived off of C-rations and coffee, and Mrs. Betty lived on whatever was left from the boys’ plates when they got finished eating.

As time went on, the family “lucked up” and lived on base for a couple of years. Bobby didn’t get any orders again until July 1988. By this time, Mrs. Betty decided to come home to Greenville, North Carolina, to be with family. This way it gave Mrs. Betty a chance to be with her parents and the boys could get a chance to meet their cousins. The trip didn’t last long because Bobby had come home in July 1989 and then the family had moved back to Kentucky in August 1989.



*Glenn & Gregg, Mrs. Betty's Sons*

On April 19, 1990, to Mrs. Betty’s surprise, she was blessed with a gift that she didn’t even know that she even had. The local flower shop on the base was looking for someone with floral experience, so she went and applied for the job. To her surprise, she got the job. The floral lady showed Mrs. Betty the basic flower arranging. Mrs. Betty said, “All I knew what to do was put water in a vase. But sadly four months later, the floral lady’s husband died. The owner of the shop had asked her to become manager of the floral shop.

Mrs. Betty said, “I was gonna tell her no, and God spoke the words out of my mouth and said ‘I will do

my best.” So Mrs. Betty became manager until the owner of the shop lost the shop in April 1992.

Finally, army life came to an end when Bobby retired from the army in June 1992. After that, the family moved back home to North Carolina. “Being in the army with my husband has been a good life. Sometimes I really miss it and I wish I could take another trip back to Germany,” said Mrs. Betty.

Glenn the oldest son went into the Navy for four years, stationed in California. Glen then married Cheryl, and they have one son named Tyler. Greg, the youngest son, went into the Army for six years and was stationed at Fort Bragg. Greg is now married to Jennifer, and they have three sons—Brandon, Tyler, and Jace.

Mrs. Betty said, “I never dreamed someone would ask me to let them write about my life. I thought you were joking and all I could do was laugh.”

Since the first day that I met Mrs. Betty, she has always given great advice for young girls to follow and to not make mistakes in their lives. She has already “been there and done that.” But as we came to the

closing of the time we spent together, Mrs. Betty began to pour out a lot of advice for women to follow, such as “Girls should be true to themselves.” She then went on into detail saying, “You mean more to God than you’ll ever know. He knew what he was doing when he made you.” Then she went on to say, “Don’t ever let anyone—especially boys—make you think you are not worth anything. Those are all lies. You are worth something.”

The one thing that stayed with me was when she said, “To the young girls out in the world—I love you, and I love you enough to say this: love yourself. Prove to yourself what you can do. You owe that boy nothing. If he says, ‘If you love me, you’ll have sex with me,’ you can look at him and say, ‘If you loved me at all or had any respect for me at all, you would have never asked me to prove it to you, so go and find someone else. There are plenty of fish in the sea. Just ask God where they are at, and he will lead you to the right one. You are precious in God’s eye because God has a special plan for you, and his plan for you is in Jeremiah 29:11-13.”





# Henrietta “Mudduck” Gorham

*Life Ain't Been No Crystal Stair*

Kenneth Worsley

*H*enrietta “Mudduck” Gorham was born on October 24, 1945, at Beaufort County Hospital. Her parent’s names were Henry S. Gorham and Daisy Moore Gorham Jackson. She was the third out of seven children. “I was named after my father.”

She recalls her father sharing that he wanted a boy. When he saw that it was girl, he immediately named her Henrietta. He asked family and friends to call her Henri for short. When I asked about how she obtained the nick name, Mudduck, she told me that the boys in the neighborhood gave her that name because she would make mud pies for them to eat. “I wasn’t flirting though.”



*Henrietta “Mudduck” Gorham.*

In spite of having a daughter, Mudduck’s father and mother loved her dearly. She recalls having a tight-knit family. Her parents were committed to keeping the family together. Everyone in the house was instructed to look out for one another. Chores were assigned to each of the children, so that they would understand the value of a dollar.

Mudduck and her sisters would work inside the house while her brothers worked outside. But, all of them worked in the family garden and tending hogs. However, she took upon herself to work outside as well. One morning she asked her father if she could work with him outdoors. He was against it, but he allowed her to

work with him. "I killed a snake while I worked with my father."

Her father owned a community store that catered to the needs of the people. The store had basic grocery items. Also, people could purchase hog feed, chicken feed, and kerosene. Interestingly, the store didn't have a name, yet everyone that

patronized it called it the "little store on the corner." However, the store was just a supplement to the main income of the home. Her father worked at a local gas company putting down gas tanks. Her mother handled the store when she was not doing her domestic work or working in

family garden. "I was not allowed to work in the store much because I would sneak and eat sweets."

The store brought perks along with it. Her mother established credit with other wholesale stores down the street. Whatever the family needed, she was able to get it. Therefore, eating was not a problem. Moreover, her mother sewed clothes for the children to wear, so she didn't have to shop too much for clothing. Mudduck considered this to be a great blessing. "We didn't have much, but we worked for what we had."

Even though the family didn't have many things, the home life was sweet. She remembers the house they lived in being a decent place to stay. During that time, the house didn't have running water, and they

had an outhouse for a bathroom. It would be some years later that running water and a toilet was placed in the home.

Interestingly, the family home was in an integrated community. Segregation was prevalent during those times, but everybody in the community

got along. She does recall having a little white friend she played with, but her friend's father really didn't want the two playing together due to skin color. "There were times that we hid from him, so that we could play."

Mudduck did have a friend that didn't mind

the color of her skin. The family had a dog by the name of Carlo.

Carlo was so big that they tied him up with a thick chain. Carlo would get excited when he would see her. He would jump around in circles every time she visited him. Carlo would howl loudly when she left him to go in for the evening.

In the evening, the family would listen to the radio because there was no television in the home. She used her imagination while she listened to the radio. However, her parents made sure that everybody's homework was done before they were permitted to sit and listen. One Saturday, her father came through the door excited. He looked at everyone, and said, "Let's go get a television!" The children cheered for joy while her mother hugged her husband. "We were able to



*Henry & Daisy Gorham, Mudduck's Parents*

watch the Cisco Kid. All of us would sing the theme song."

On Sundays, the family would be sitting in church singing songs. Going to church was not an option. There were times when her father could not make it to church, but her mother made sure that the rest of the family was present. Sometimes, the family walked to church, and sometimes they hitchhiked a ride with other parishioners or strangers. Both parents worked faithfully in the church, and they worked with the children at home, so that they would enjoy church too.

However, she felt that her parents were very strict about certain things. For instance, her parents didn't attend movies or dances, and the children were not allowed to date. Of course, this kind of restraint leads to a little rebellion.

"I recall my sister and me sneaking off to a neighborhood dance, but it wasn't long before momma came and got us. It was a long walk home." She recalls laughing about what happened with her sister afterward when they were sent to bed. "That's enjoyment for you."

The family enjoyed the holidays as well. "It was a time of luxuries." All of the family and friends would come together on holidays to eat. The house would be



*Mudduck with Siblings*

full inside, and there would be a myriad of people on the outside. Every family would bring a dish to the house, so that there would be a lot of food. Mudduck loved Christmas. She remembers her mother taking pantyhose from her dresser. She would cut the stockings, and put various pieces of fruits in them such as apples, oranges, and tangerines. The children always looked forward to receiving their stockings.

Mudduck's parents worked hard to provide for their children, and they were really adamant about their children's education. At that time, school was year round, but they did not attend

school on holidays. Mudduck excelled in her school work. She enjoyed reading a lot. During that time, students were not allowed to talk back to their teachers or misbehave. If any misconduct took place, the teachers were allowed to implement corporal punishment. "Some teachers would throw erasers at the students!"

In the third grade, she

*"I recall my sister and me sneaking off to a neighborhood dance, but it wasn't long before momma came and got us. It was a long walk home."*



did get in trouble. The teacher punished her by not allowing her to eat lunch. She went home and told her parents what happened. The very next day her father went to the school to set the teacher straight. "Daddy was mad, but he handled the matter in a calm manner."

She continued to excel in her academics in high school. She was in clubs that went various places, and she received honors and held offices during her tenure in high school. She believed that she had a solid educational foundation that prepared her for higher learning. "I loved the school clubs because that was the only time I got away from home." (She laughs)

After high school, she attended Kitra Junior College which was located past Raleigh, and is no longer in operation. It was an experience for her because it was her first time being away from home, and she cried for several months. Furthermore, the college was below standard. The school was in a dilapidated state. For instance, the water wasn't running well, windows were broken or cracked. During the cold season, students had to stuff the windows with blankets to keep the air out. However, the instructors worked hard to teach the students. Upon completion of Kitra, she attended Elizabeth City State University.

During the summer break, she returned home and worked at the county nursing home part-time. She aided the nurses in feeding and bathing the patients. The patients became attached to Mudduck. The supervisor informed her that two patients requested

that she would be the one to help them. "I will never forget working with those patients."

Mudduck graduated from ECSU the following May in 1968, and she went back to work in the nursing home for a short time. After that, she became employed at the original John Small School. She worked there a couple of years and was a part of the movement to integrate schools. After the schools were integrated, she then worked at the original P.S. Jones.

Then, she moved Washington D.C., to start a new life. She decided to date more during that time, but she didn't marry. During that time, Mudduck tried to get things settled in her life. She continued to work in the educational arena. She found a church home as well. Also, she had her first child, Fumel "Stinky" Gorham. While working in D.C., she and her co-workers found out that their teaching positions would

be terminated. She received unemployment benefits for a year. Mudduck decided the best move she could make was to come back home to North Carolina.

When she arrived back in Washington, she continued in the school system as a substitute teacher. She worked for a year to help a teacher that was having health issues. During her tenure as a substitute, she learned of an opening at the Washington Police Department.

The position that was open was Records Clerk. The employee that held the position was being



*Mudduck & Her Children*



overwhelmed because he also worked as a Dispatcher. Mudduck applied for the job, and she was hired, but only as a seeder worker, and because it was funded by the government, she could only hold the position for two years. However, Mudduck worked diligently, and the Chief of Police at the time was impressed with her. As a result, the WPD kept her for three years, but the Chief was sent a memo to either hire or fire her.

Mudduck wrote her own job description as a records clerk because the WPD never had one before.

She was hired as the first full time records clerk, and she worked the position for a number of years. Prior to that, she was promoted to Records Clerk Supervisor, and she had one person under her supervision. Mudduck felt

blessed to work there. Moreover, she was the only civilian to work in the police department; she was one of two black female employees. She had a good working relationship with her co-workers.

Mudduck faced a difficult time during her tenure at WPD. She became pregnant with her second child, Alex "Bird" Gorham. He was born as a strong and healthy baby boy. However, Alex's health began to fail. She took him to several doctors in the area, and they couldn't understand why he was sick. Finally, she took Alex to Chapel Hill, and it was then she found out that Alex's heart was failing.

Having to work and take Alex back and forth to the doctor took its toll on her. It began affecting her work as well. During that time, she had to work part time as a Dispatcher because the other employee was soon to retire. She was falling behind, and she was overwhelmed. Mudduck's supervisor at the time felt that he needed to say something on her behalf. He argued to the Chief that she needed more help. He stressed that if she were white, he would have given her help already. "It was a very stressful time for me."

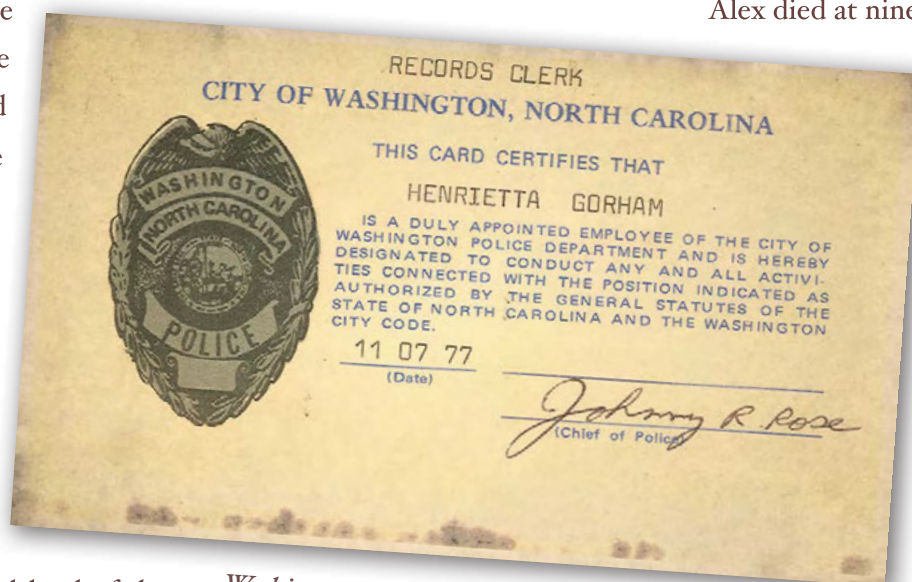
Alex died at nine months old.

A f t e r Alex's death, Mudduck felt like she needed to make some personal changes in her life. She was able to get back on track at work, and she invested a lot of time into her daughter. She re-

mained unmarried and sought to grow in her faith. She worked at WPD until she retired in 2001.

During retirement, Mudduck was faced with another difficult problem. Her mother was becoming very ill. Mudduck and the family found out that her mother had Alzheimer's. Many of her brothers and sisters lived out of town. Since Mudduck lived down the street from her mother, she decided to go and take care of her mother daily. "My life was literally put on hold."

She took care of her mother faithfully. Mudduck would walk to her mother's house each day. She would watch the weather to stay informed if the weather



*Washington Police Department ID Badge*

would be rainy or inclement. On rainy days and inclement days, she would catch a ride because she no longer drove. At her mother's house she would clean, cook, and do yard work as well. "I had a lot of my plate."

Mudduck recalled an incident in her mother's yard. Her mother's house sat high up on a steep hill. Also, the house was on the corner of a busy intersection. She was raking up some pine cones, and lost footing due to a divot in the ground. She fell and began sliding down the steep hill. Fortunately, she was able to prevent herself from sliding into the streets.

Some years ago, Mudduck's mother passed away at home. She expressed that prayer, support from family, and friends helped her through that time of difficulty. She gives credit to God for strengthening her, so that she could care for her mother. "My life ain't been no crystal stairs."

I asked Mudduck is there anything that she would change about her life. She said, "It was a lot of things as a young single woman I wouldn't have done. I wouldn't have involved myself with relationships that

ended in a downward spiral. I would have taken advantage of opportunities offered to me. However, in all that I went through, I didn't become bitter, but better."

Today, Henrietta "Mudduck" Gorham ministers to young women. Also, she ministers on various weekends in the men's and women's prisons. She has a card ministry in which she writes uplifting messages to

people on their birthdays, anniversaries, or just to say "I love you." She may not have had many crystal stairs in life, yet she is working so that others may have crystal stairs in their lives.

I've had the privilege to become a part of Mudduck's life. When I first met her, she began to encourage my life. There were times when I didn't believe in myself, and she would say something that helped me along the way.

Mudduck and I became very close over the years. I call her mom, and she calls me son.

We've had conversations about the passing of her son. I expressed to her that I can never replace the son she lost, but I will be the son she can count on. She has been a jewel to my life, and for that I am grateful.



*Furmel & Alex*

*"I desire to live a life of integrity that will help and impact the lives of others."*

# Linda McGhee Woolard

## *Anything But an Ordinary Life*

Karen Harris

*M*y mother, Linda Lee McGhee, had anything but an ordinary life. She was born in a naval hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to a James and Hilda McGhee on

December 27, 1951. They were on their way to Virginia because Hilda wanted to stay with her mom while James was going to be shipped overseas. With all the traveling with Linda's dad being in the Air Force, most of her brothers and sisters were born in different locations.

In 1955, on October 14th, James Kennedy (Kenny), Linda's first sibling, was born in Washington State. In 1956, her little sister Susan was born in Lyon, France. For a while, it was just the three of them until they moved to Poquoson, Virginia, when Hilda decided it was time for more children. On May 17th,



*Linda, 1950s*

1960, Ronnie McGhee, Linda's second brother, was brought into the world. Three years later, Linda's fourth and final sibling Sandra was born.

With five siblings under the same roof,

fight were inevitable. Linda and Susan used to fight the most. Susan used to borrow Linda's toys and always brought them back to her "messed up." This bothered her a lot because they didn't have many toys to play with. "We were dirt poor," Linda said. They had only 3 dresses to wear all year round. They wore the same pair of shoes until the shoes were completely worn out. Most people now buy shoes to wear with each outfit. That was unheard of for the McGhee family. Being poor has advantages as well. Linda learned to appreciate even



the small things in life - things that most people would find insignificant.

To conserve what little they did have, in the summer the children would go barefoot. "We learned quickly to watch out for honey bees," she said. One time, when Linda was around eight or nine she went running outside and stepped right on a honey bee. James had to take the stinger out, and then he put baking soda and water on it. "It didn't take long for it to feel better after my dad put his concoction on it."

When Linda was six, she had a traumatic experience. She was living in Texas at the time. She was playing in the sand while other older kids played baseball. A child hit the ball, then threw the bat, and Linda got hit right in the head. Linda was unconscious until she was at the hospital. "I didn't even get to enjoy the ambulance ride!" Linda had to get stitches, and to this day she, still has a scar from it.

According to the other siblings, Linda was overly bossy. This came with the territory being the oldest of five. Her mother was in and out of hospitals because she was diagnosed schizophrenic, so the burden of motherhood came early for Linda. She said her mom acted fine as long as she was on her medication. However, Hilda did not like the way that they made her feel and refused some days. These were the days she had to fill the mother role the most. Her dad was around a lot, so it wasn't too hard on her to take care of everyone. When her dad was home, everyone knew it because he was very strict. He was

extremely firm on responsibility and chores being done around the house.

The chore that sticks out in her mind the most is the milking of the cows and goats. This was a chore

she grew fond of and caught on rather quickly. "Once you do something every day, it doesn't take long to get the hang of it." Goat milk was one of her favorite drinks growing up. Linda's face frowned as she remembered her first bad experience with the goat milk. "You have to make sure that the goats and cows didn't eat onions, onion flavored milk was terrible. That goat made for a good laugh as well."

Linda grins, "my father would always try and load the goat on the truck,

and he would charge and put him flat on his butt!"

Another chore Linda remembers having to do was hoeing the garden. "Kenny, Susan, and I had to get started on the garden as soon as the sun came up," Linda said. She used to put on her bathing suit first, and then went outside to the garden. Why not get some sun while doing work you hated, she thought. The garden wouldn't have been a good one if it wasn't for Linda and the others working on it. James always planted tomatoes, corn, watermelon, cantaloupe, banana melon (a large cantaloupe that looks like a banana), strawberries, and squash. Other than vegetables, the family mainly ate fish or deer.

The last chore she recalls doing on the farm was taking care of the black and tan coonhounds. She used to feed them every day in the afternoon. Those coonhounds were a big part of their family. They used



*James Kennedy, Linda's Brother*



to take the coonhounds to AKC Field Trials. These trials were like competitions to see whose coonhound could follow the coon scent all the way through the woods to a certain point. The dogs who could follow the scent and get there the fastest won the competition. Linda said, "We had a mantle full of trophies that the dogs had won."

Even though her dad was very strict and they had lots of chores to do, they always found time for entertainment. When he was home, he would play sports with them. "When playing games, the one who had dad on their team always won. He always played like a grown up. He never took it easy on us kids." Some of the games Linda used to play were baseball, kickball, Chinese checkers, hide and seek, and canasta.

Canasta is a card game that was very popular back then.

When Linda played games with her siblings, they also got a group together. When they played hide and go seek, they enjoyed playing in the dark. "We used to go outside at night and use flashlights to find everyone. I loved to play!"

Linda's first job was in the 1970s at Langley Air force base in Hampton, VA. She was under a temporary contract as a secretary. She was paid between \$2 and \$3 an hour. She worked there six months before her contract ran out.

Her second job was in a veterinary office. She remembers having to clean poop, help groom dogs, and assisting the veterinarian. Sometimes being a veterinarians' aid was difficult emotionally and

physically. One time, she was trying to hold a boxer so that Dr. Roger could examine him, and the boxer bit her twice.

Another time a lady had brought in a wild dog that had a terrible "taste of mange." Dr. Roger didn't know if the dog was going to last being de-wormed. After he was de-wormed, he seemed ok, but the next morning they found him dead. "It broke my heart to see a dog like that."

Linda started school in France until she was in the first grade; then, she went to school in Hampton, VA, and finished first through third grades. This was very difficult for the children because as soon as they made friends, they had to leave them behind. Once they moved to Poquoson, VA, she was able to go to school there from fourth grade up until graduation from

high school.

At the Poquoson School, she was part of the Glee Club. She enjoyed this but was very shy. "No solos for me!" she said. She did, however, perform in a group at holiday shows. The holiday shows were always held in the auditorium. The events were always packed full of people to watch the kids perform.

However, Linda's family never came to watch her perform. She recalls her parents never even going to any parent/teacher meetings either. When I asked her why, she said they just never did. "I knew what it was like to have parents who didn't support me in anything, so I tried my best to make sure my kids new I supported them in everything they did." She fulfilled her goal.



*Linda's Mom, Hilda*

Growing up, my mom always went to a Methodist church. She was never made to go but she just wanted to. She recalls being the only one out of her family that went. As years went by, she met a couple who introduced themselves as Jehovah's Witnesses. She was skeptical about them because she heard awful things about them, such as that they are a cult and that they don't believe in Jesus. She decided that she would give them a chance though. She began studying the Bible with the couple. After about 6 months, she decided she wanted to become baptized. She was baptized in July 1972. She is still a Jehovah's Witness to this day.

About a year after she became a Jehovah's Witness, she met her first husband, John. She never had a boyfriend until him. She recalls being 20 when they met. He was the one to make the first move, which wasn't surprising knowing how shy my mom was. Her dad and the elders at church told her that she should get to know him for a while before getting serious with him because they didn't trust him. Out of spite, she decided to get involved with him anyway. They got married and moved to Florida to stay with his family. While in Florida, he had an indiscretion with his brother's wife. Linda said she could never trust him again after that, but she still decided to stay with him. Shortly after this, they decided to move to Virginia to stay with her family.

When I asked her to describe him, she said he was "a whole lot of stupid!" We both laughed at that. She recalled him heading home one day from work when he got in trouble with the cops for driving the

wrong way on a one-way street. When he got pulled over, he decided to confess to "other things" that he had been doing in the neighborhood. He was then arrested and sent away. My mom can't recall how long he was sentenced, but it was a long time.

While John was away, Russell, a neighbor in the same apartment building asked her if she needed a ride to visit John. She didn't have a car at the time, so she said yes. Afterwards, they would go grab a bite to eat. They kept doing this for a while when one day John told Linda that he didn't want her to visit anymore, so she said okay. Linda never found out why he didn't want her to visit him anymore. "Russell always stayed in the car while I visited John, so I know it

wasn't because of Russell." After she stopped visiting John, she still kept talking to Russell.

After some time went by, she decided to write John a letter and let him know she wanted a divorce and that she had fallen in love with another man. "I was scared of what he might do once he got out, so I mailed the letter from Norfolk, VA, when really we were living in Newport News, VA." On July 12, 1984, they were married by the Justice of the Peace. Five years after they got married, they decided they wanted to have children. Russell had already had a child from a previous marriage, but Linda had never had children.

At the age of 36, Linda gave birth to Karen Elizabeth on August 11, 1988. Then, they decided to have another child two and a half years later. She had a boy named Bobby Earl. Both children were named after their grandparents. Karen Elizabeth came from

*That goat made for a good laugh as well." Linda grins, "my father would always try and load the goat on the truck and he would charge and put him flat on his butt."*

her grandmother Carrie Elizabeth. Bobby came from his grandpa Bobby, but his middle name came from his dad's middle name.

When their kids were in the second grade, they decided to move to Washington, NC. Russell was raised in Bath, NC. He thought raising us here would be a better environment for us to live.

While at Bath Elementary, my brother and I played baseball and softball. My mom was always at every game in the stands cheering us on. We knew we could always count on her.

Mom and Dad were together for 21 years before cancer took him from my mother. Once Russell passed away, Linda knew she needed to find a job. She was out of the work force for so long because she just stayed at home with us kids, so she decided to go back to school.

She decided to attend Beaufort County Community College to get her Associates in Computer Programming. After going to school for three years, she finally received her degree. She knew as soon as she had her degree that she would be able to find a job. "It didn't work out the way I wanted it too," she said. Linda didn't have any work experience that went along with the degree, so it was hard for her to find a job. She never gave up on trying to find a job.

After about a year or so, she finally got a temporary job at Social Services. She worked there helping customers get Medicaid. She worked for a few months until her contract ended; then, she was hired

at Job Link. She still works there now. She loves working there as an accountant.

After Linda's husband passed away, she felt so lonely. She decided she wasn't going to remarry again because Russell had taken her heart.

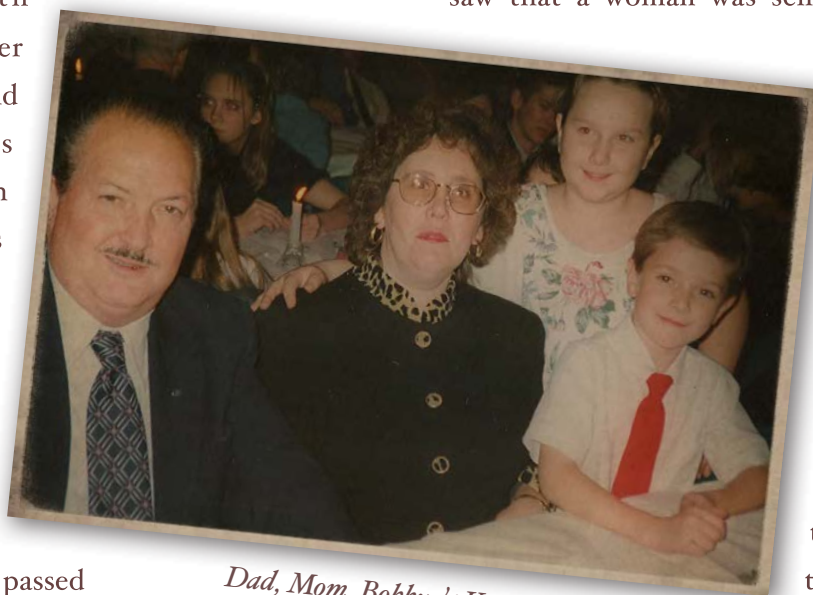
However, she did decide to get a dog to help with being lonely. She looked in the paper one day and saw that a woman was selling a black Poodle/Jack

Russell puppy for \$50.

She drove 30 miles to go pick him up. She loved her little dog from the beginning. It didn't take her long to come up with the name for her dog. She decided to name him Jack. She still has Jack to give her love to. She thought besides her kids and Jack that she couldn't

love again but she was wrong.

When she first set eyes on her first grandchild (Tre'von), her heart opened up to a whole new experience. When I was in labor with Tre'von, my mom was there the whole time. Without my mom, husband, and nurse, I know I would not have gone through the process as well as I did. Once Tre'von was here, Mom was one of the first ones to hold him. Three hours went by happily until tragedy struck; Tre'von stopped breathing. My husband called a nurse immediately to help find out what happened. The nurse was able to get him to breathe again, but he had to stay in the NICU for testing. Linda's heart seemed to break. Tre'von wound up getting an infection from swallowing fluids while coming into this world. He was in NICU for one week before he was able to be in



*Dad, Mom, Bobby & Karen.*

the regular nursery. Linda was so happy for Tre'von recovering from the experience so quickly. "It seemed like a long time for his family, but from dying to being completely healthy in a week is a miracle." I laugh when I think about how Mom calls and asks about Tre'von, more than she wants to ask about me now.

Linda thought that she would be enjoying only Tre'von as a grandchild for a while but to her surprise, Bobby's girlfriend will be having a girl in October of this year.

My mom has had anything but an ordinary life, but she is still the strongest person I know.




*Linda & Grandson, Tre'von*



# Mary Jane Oden

*I had some bumps, but I had some good times too.*

Sarah Luberisse

n September 30, 1937, in Bath, North Carolina, Mary Jane Oden was born to Mary Eliza and William Oden. Her mother was a housewife, and her father was a farmer and also worked in “logwoods.” He was the provider for the family. Her family ate dinner every night at the dinner table. Breakfast and supper were always a must to have. They really didn’t cook for lunch. I asked more about her mom, and she said she was strict but she was the best mom that she could be. She was a great cook and cooked for everybody around her. Meals in Mary’s household would consist of string beans, collards, salads, fatback meat, biscuits, dry beans, and rutabagas.

Mary grew up in a small town where everybody knew everybody. From kindergarten up to seventh



*Mary Jane Oden*

grade, she attended Bayside Elementary in Bath, which was their elementary school. Mary didn’t enjoy school very much; she didn’t play any sports and wasn’t in any extracurricular activities. She did enjoy going to school dances and proms because she loved to dance. “That’s what’s wrong with my legs now,” she said. “Before me and my husband were in a relationship, we would see each other at the school dances. I would always be dancing with my other friends. At this time, I didn’t know he was smitten with me. When we got together, he told me he would always watch me dance from a distance.”

In her youth, they had to pump water and use a wash board to have clean clothing. “I remember going outside in the heat to pump water out the pump, and I would always stand for minutes to just take a drink of

the water. Water just doesn't taste the same these days." When I asked her what they used to clean their home she laughed and said, "We had normal chores as washing dishes and sweeping the floor with a straw broom. We didn't have a Swiffer back in those days." I told her that we don't have a Swiffer now! Times have not changed that much when it comes to household chores.

She then attended Pantego high school where she graduated. Her first car was a navy blue Studebaker, which she got from her father. She had it until she graduated high school. "I can remember the white wall tires that made the car move, the stench of the leather seats mixed in with the scent of my father's cheap cigars. Every time I would enter the car, I could see where he had dropped ashes and would burn a little hole in the driver's seat. Each time I got in that car I would always think about my father." Mary was a daddy's girl; all her dresses and hats were bought by him. "He wanted me looking better than the other little girls because I was his only girl."

I asked her about her first love and she immediately said, "I don't know what we called it back then but his name was Thomas Spencer." She recalls that when she was 16 years old, he was her first boyfriend, and they would go steady. Mary was allowed to date a little, but she didn't date a lot. "Mama was strict about the boys. She would say 'Keep your feet flat on the floor, skirt down, and your legs crossed.'"

A year after her graduation, Mary got married. She had a house wedding. "Just mostly family," she said. "My dress was the most beautiful lace gown. It wasn't new, but it was new to me and I loved it just the same. I had my mother's veil from her wedding, my grandmothers pearl necklace, and my aunt did my hair so beautiful. That day is picture perfect in my mind." Mary's mother told her husband that Mary could not cook and asked him if he still wanted to marry her.

Mary could not boil water without burning it, but she learned how to cook after she got married. She and her husband at that time, Allen Brooks, then started a family, and in all, she had five children to provide for. "Three singles and a set of twins" she called it.

Mary worked very hard and had many jobs. She ran an inhome daycare in Bath, and she worked for Hamilton Beach Products for 19 years when she retired. She then took a cake decorating class offered at Beaufort County Community College, and enjoyed that very much. That's what she did often. She also enjoyed sewing. Her kids were in plays at church and at school and she would make their costumes. Mary can't do much sewing these days because of doing it so much when she was younger. It wore her hands out.

She then took up a nursing program at the College of the Albamarle in Elizabeth City, after which she became a nursing assistant. She said, "I enjoyed nursing because at Hamilton beach I used to bring my work home which was not good for my family. So



nursing was a relief on them and me.” She worked in nursing still supporting her five children. And in church, she became the choir director, usher director and still ushered as well. She was also a Sunday school teacher for the children.

Besides her jobs, Mary had many titles to uphold. She was very religious and was in church every Sunday. Growing up, she admired the many works you could do for the lord. Mary got married a second time to Bishop Daniels Davis and moved to Manteo. “I loved it down there, but I’m afraid of the water,” she giggled. “My husband would fish. I would go, but I would sit way back from the water watching him from a distance. He would always try to coax me to come closer but I would refuse.”

I asked her how they went about gathering food. “Either from going to the store or growing it ourselves,” she said. “We had a garden, but we had to go to the store for certain things. Food was not as expensive as it is now. You could get a soda for 5 cents back then.” Her favorite candy bars were Baby Ruths.

Weekly dinners in their house were mostly certain kinds of beans like kidney, black eyed peas, or great northern beans—mainly because it was easy to fill you up. They were served with biscuits, and meat was easy to come by, having butchers around every corner.

She told me that her elementary school teacher was Mrs. Whitfield. She could remember her from getting in trouble because she beat up a boy who was

picking with her, and she broke the wall dividing the kids. Back when she was in school, they did not have separate classrooms for kids. They had a wall in one classroom separating different subjects. Going through



middle school she had many encounters with getting into fights. Her punishment was that she had to write 100 times on the chalkboard that “I will not express my feelings in acts of violence.” She says “I can still remember the feel of the chalk in my hand, and I can visualize the powder that fell on my shoes, and

getting home from school and staring in the mirror and seeing the chalk on my face.”

She was also a pretty tough kid which she had to be because as a child she lost one of her eyes. She had a tumor, and back then the doctors weren’t as knowledgeable as they are today. The doctor was trying to not leave a scar on her face. That’s when they had to graft skin from her back. When she was fifteen, the children picked and people in the streets would pick. A few years later, they started making prosthesis, which are man-made eyes. “They used to be as hard as rocks,” she said. But now she has no problems, and you can’t even tell it’s not real.

“I wasn’t in love with my children’s father, I just married him because I didn’t think anyone would want me because of my eye, but I still tried to do my wifely duties. I guess that’s why I had all them chillens. I did all the cooking, cleaning, caring for the children, folding clothes up, and picking up behind everybody in the house, and I did it with love in my heart.”

I asked her was her life more enjoyable now or then and what she liked and disliked about how times have changed in the world. "To me I guess things were inconvenient for us back then because we didn't have electricity and our technology wasn't as advanced as it is today, but we had a peaceful lifestyle back then. You didn't have to worry about locking your doors, and when you went back home, everything was the same."

As her children got older, that's when she and her husband separated, and she moved to Washington, NC. Mary had five kids to keep busy, so to keep their minds off doing wrong she would play household games with them. She would always make it so that a different child would win each time they played because she believed in fairness. She knew what type of personalities her children had, and they were so competitive. For hobbies, they went to the movies. She loved westerns. And they went on picnics where they cooked in the back yard and had food like fish, hamburgers, hotdogs, and cotton candy for the kids after lunch.

"I never dreamed the Lord would bring my ministry to where it is, and I feel that I have not yet reached the zenith because we've got such wonderful things planned!" She gives love to her mother as a strong influence in her life. When her children were in school she would go around the community in her spare time to take food to the sick and needy, sort of like meals on wheels.

Besides being a mother to her own children, Mrs. Mary is like an all-around mother even to her neighbor's kids or just to someone in need of a friend. She had all the neighborhood children calling her grandma. "Children would all come up to me and ask for advice, and they would listen and do what I say cause they knew I wouldn't tell them no lies."

I asked her how she took time to herself from dealing with the kids and work, and she said, "Laughter, because it kept you from crying most of the time. I tried to stay in high spirits for my chillens."

Family traditions in her household were like any other household living in the south. They celebrated holidays such as Christmas, birthdays, and Easter. But the best of all were the Sunday dinners. That is when they sat around the table

saying what they were thankful for in their lives. Each one would go around and tell what they did during the year that they were proud of and what they could improve on to make it a better year than before. They would all discuss things that they could change to be a better person. Also they would ask each family member for forgiveness if they did anything or said anything to hurt them. She believed in starting off the week on a good note, and she wanted to instill this same belief in her children.

She is very proud of all of her kids but one particular moment she recalled was when her daughter "Cookie" was in the Junior Olympics and got a trophy

*"To me I guess things were inconvenient for us back then because we didn't have electricity and our technology wasn't as advanced as it is today, but we had a peaceful lifestyle back then."*



and a chance to meet the President of the United States at the time.

I asked her how she knew she was getting older. She said, “When a person reaches 30, they should celebrate their birthday every other year, then, after 50 only celebrate their birthday whenever they remember it. I almost forgot (my memory is not what it used to be), everybody grows old but not many people grow up. Take advantage of it today and enjoy getting older.” She does not regret anything in life because she realizes that the choices she made, whether wrong or right, were still her choices. “I am thankful for my family and friends.” She outlived her husband, but she knows that his love is engraved in her heart. They would travel with the church on trips, and they would always stay an extra day just to explore more and to be in each other’s company. They would bring back gifts for the kids—just because. Even after her kids got older, they still carried on this tradition.

Soon after the kids moved out, there were more things to do like take her grandkids out for a stroll in the park. “When my first grandson was born, I can remember when they brought him to me. It was just like looking at an angel. With his football-sized hands he could save the whole world. He was beautiful, and then I knew I had some more living to do.”

I asked her if she ever had to witness racism in her lifetime, and she said, “Of course we had little situations, but nothing major. The white folks did act like they didn’t want us to breathe the air they did, but

we just lived our lives and wanted them to do the same. But they were stuck in their own isolated world.”

Since she was the preacher’s wife, she was in the spotlight all the time. “There was no room to make mistakes. I had so many women in the church looking up to me that I had to watch myself. That was no problem—it’s just some church folks need to know that we are all people, and we are not perfect.”

Mrs. Mary lives by herself today and has her little fishes to keep her company. “Four little fish in bowl - three silver and one gold,” she said with laughter. She loves to read her Bible daily. “It keeps me uplifted to read my Bible, and it gives me good hope.” She watches all the latest TV shows and loves Wheel of Fortune. “You know how gracious is our Lord—what we ask for, we get.” Mary held on to a lot of hurt from being picked on as a child and a teen, but her faith in God keeps her moving.

To stay in good health, she takes walks daily, and tries to eat healthy by eating the right foods and the right amounts. Since she ate so wrong when she was younger, she thought it was too late to even start eating or working out right. But it’s never too late to start.

Some of her hobbies now are scrapbooking for her kids and grandkids so that the family has something to look at when they come to visit. She loves gospel music and likes to go bird watching with her friends and grandkids. She has a home computer and internet, so she is slowly learning how to use it. “Back in my day all we had was paper, pencil, and an




encyclopedia. So having a computer is a big jump for me, but I'm getting there slowly but surely," she laughed.

When her grandkids come over, she reads their favorite stories from *The Cat in the Hat* to them, and if they stay over they get to have homemade smores with lots of marshmallows and plenty of "no good chocolate," as she calls it, and they sit around the living room telling bedtime stories. "I enjoy when my little ones come over because they make me feel young again. They make me smile on my worst days, and I

am thankful for the joy that God has given them to give to me."

"Every time I get discouraged, I keep asking God to give my family; stronger faith, strength, courage and patience until his will is done. I have always been a strong person who seeks God for guidance and I feel our faith is being tested now. I know by praying that God will eventually answer our prayers because he has blessed us by supplying what we need thus far. I encourage all that do not know him to seek him to make their lives truly fulfilled."

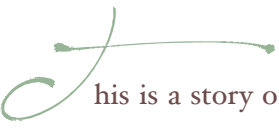


*"If it had not been for God I would have never made it through.  
I had some bumps, but I had some good days too."*

# Donald Spencer

## *A Man Full of Wisdom*

Forrest Howell

his is a story of a hard working man—a man who had a passion for his work and his wife. As I stepped out of the car, my ears were greeted with an old man whistling a soothing tune. He was sitting in his rocking chair on the front porch watching the wind blow by. Each wrinkle in his hands showed hard work, experience, and wisdom. Join me on this journey back in time into the life Donald James Spencer.

On August 7, 1920, Donald James Spencer was born. Donald was born the son of the late Myrtle and William Spencer. Donald was the third of four children. He was raised in Roper, NC. Donald remembers fishing, farming, and hunting as a young child.

He describes his home as an old house with warped weatherboarding. At the top of a ragged hill grown over with scrubby oaks stands a dingy, four-room cabin. The two rooms of which it consisted originally had been painted green, but except for a few streaks here and there, the paint has long since rubbed

off. A fire-pit was in the backyard for burning trash, and there was a large barn for animals. The smoke, caught by the wind, had swirled and blackened the cabin and outhouses. Although pleasant, with green fields rimmed by distant trees partially encircling the hill, this house near the railroad tracks was as plain as the shacks in the distant village.

It had no modern conveniences. It was heated by stoves, and it was lighted by kerosene lamps. Water was secured from a well adjacent to the pig sty in the middle of the barnyard. Donald remembers it never being painted, and the floor sagged in places. The kitchen was furnished with an old weather-beaten sideboard, a table, a safe, and a wood stove. The children ate in the bedroom. “Our house had only three rooms, two bedrooms, a kitchen, and laundry room.” Donald slept in a room with his three brothers. The house was heated by a furnace, and a wood stove.

The family didn’t have indoor plumbing or electricity until the early 1940’s. They took baths once

a week, unless there were special occasions. They used a tub, wash cloth, and homemade soap called lye. Donald remembers having an ice box that they would “refrigerate” their perishable food items. The ice came off a truck in about 30 pound chunks. In the backyard they had a huge caldron that they washed their clothes in twice a week. Donald’s responsibility was to keep a fire going beneath it so the water would boil and clean the clothes.

Since all the boys slept in one room they had to get along with each other. There were times when they would get into arguments, but they didn’t last long. There daddy would come storming in with his leather belt and quickly ended any disputes. “It didn’t matter who started it, we all got the belt.” They didn’t have toys, and when Christmas came, a new pair of pajamas could be expected. What little things that Donald and his brothers had for entertainment were taken care of. “We appreciated what we had. Kids today don’t care.”

On occasion, Donald and his brothers would receive a new set of “Sunday clothes.” These clothes were meant to only be worn to church. The Spencers attended Mackey’s Episcopal Methodist Church, now known as Mackey’s United Methodist Church. The children didn’t have a choice about going to church on Sunday mornings.

Every morning, Donald and his brothers were expected to have the eggs collected, the cows milked, and wood chopped by six in the morning. After the morning chores, they gathered at the table for a full

breakfast. Breakfast consisted of bacon, eggs, and grits.

Everything the Spencer family ate was home grown or hunted by Donald and his brothers. Donald’s family had chickens, cows, hogs, horses, and mules. He remembers having a large vegetable garden also. They butchered their own meats. In order to store food,

they canned everything from vegetables to sausage; it was the only way to preserve food. If they were running low on meats for the year, they would go out and hunt for deer, bear, or rabbits. Whatever his family killed while hunting was brought home, put on the kitchen table, and cleaned.

One of Donald’s favorite hobbies was to fish. He would go down to Lake Phelps early in the morning and catch a “mess” of fish and bring them home for his mama to cook. “Whenever we had fish, the next day we had canned BBQ. Mama would always make enough coleslaw for two meals.” Donald thought his mama was one of the best cooks around.

At an early age, Donald began to work on the farm. “We raised corn, wheat, soybeans, and tobacco.” Donald was just five years old when he began to work on the farm. He had various jobs.

The wheat was harvested with a scythe. “My job was to bundle and tie it.” He explains tobacco as being one of the hardest crops to grow because it’s a time consuming process. The land had to be cleared, and they would burn out places that they wanted to sow in November. “To burn a plant bed meant that we burned brush over the spot.” That kills out grass seeds and

*"To burn a plant bed meant that we burned brush over the spot." That kills out grass seeds and ground insects and leaves ashes that help to fertilize the ground.*



ground insects and leaves ashes that help to fertilize the ground. Then as soon as the bed was “worked up,” the seeds were planted. The seeds were left to germinate, and then, a canvas was placed over top. The plants would start to sprout in late February. The plants would soon be transplanted. But before they could transplant, the fields had to be weeded and plowed. They used to mules to plow the land. “Farming was never-endin’ job!”

It wasn’t until after the birth of his youngest brother, Daniel, that his father decided to buy a tractor to help with the farming practices. “It sure was nice.” The tractor made plowing so much easier. The mules were often stubborn and had a mind of their own. Donald remembers plowing a field with the old mules and them just coming to a halt. “They could make a preacher cuss.” He whipped the mule until it bled and wouldn’t budge. Donald also remembers his oldest brother William being dragged behind one of the mules that had been spooked. The mules were dangerous, but the tractor didn’t completely end the work with mules until some years later.

Farming did indeed take up a lot of time. It took up so much time one year, Donald had to repeat the sixth grade. Donald didn’t like school much anyway. He could never pay attention and just went for the social factor. Literature and Science were his two favorite subjects, but math, on the other hand, was one of his least favorite. He recalls one of his teachers, Mrs. Whitley, as being his favorite teacher. She was always willing to help him with anything that he needed.

He recalls meeting his first “sweetheart” in the seventh grade. Donald remembers her having golden blonde hair, and the prettiest blue eyes around. “Daisy Griffin was her name.” Donald and Daisy did everything together. When Donald wasn’t working on

the farm, he was with her. They used to go out on the lake together and enjoy lunches on the shore. “We were young. I guess you could call it love at first sight.” Daisy was his everything until an argument split them up. “I didn’t end it. She said it would never work.” Daisy and Donald stayed good friends throughout high school, but never “dated” again. After high school they went their separate ways, Daisy went off to college, and Donald went to work at the farm.

“My daddy believed work could keep a boy out of trouble.” It did a pretty good job, but Donald remembers a few occasions where he slipped through the cracks. He and some of his school buddies got the bright idea to play “practical” jokes on some of the local families. They decided to move the “johns” (outhouses) a few feet back. It was the talk of the town for weeks; everybody referred to it as a “situation.” Luckily, Donald and his buddies were never caught. The rest of their jokes weren’t quite as conniving. They scared a few innocent kids, but that was about it.

When Donald was old enough to drive, he would pray for rain. The rain kept them out of the fields for a few days and gave him a chance to enjoy his teenage years. Every Friday night, at the community building in town, dances were held. Donald loved to dance. “It was one thing that made me forget about everything!” He would take his 1934 Ford into town every chance he got. There was always a good crowd at the dance. Sometimes, Donald would take his brother Daniel with him. Daniel remembers Donald being quite the dancer. “He could really shake a leg!”

A really bad thunderstorm came through Roper one Friday afternoon. “The wind picked up, and I felt a change in the air. We were our own weathermen; we ain’t had no meteorologist that I could remember.” Donald was about nineteen at the time. He headed

into town to the dance where he was reacquainted with his old flame Daisy. She had come back into town for the summer. The two of them quickly picked back up where they had left off, and she danced her way back into his heart. Donald thought he would never see her again, but true love always finds a way. The two eventually married.

The wedding was “picture perfect” as Donald described. They married in the summer of June 1943. The wedding took place outside on the banks of Lake Phelps. Donald remembers the wedding taking place in the afternoon. The sun was slowly setting and the wisteria was in full bloom. The Spanish moss and cattails swayed with the calm breeze. He recalls standing nervously waiting for his bride-to-be. When she came down the aisle all his worries drifted away. “She was beautiful. It didn’t take much, she looked good in anything.”

After the wedding, Donald and Daisy moved in with Donald’s parents. In the mean time, Donald built a house. It took him several months to complete the project, but in August, it was time for the two of them to move in. It cost him about \$2,400.00 to build.

They soon learned that they could not have children. The news was devastating to Donald, but he had plenty of nieces and nephews to keep him and his wife company. Daisy worked as a nurse at the hospital in Plymouth for 28 years before she finally retired. Donald and his younger brother Daniel continued to farm after his parents passed in the following years. His other two brothers married and moved to the western part of the state.

In October 1953, Donald remembers one of the worst storms to hit North Carolina. It was Hurricane Hazel. His soybean crop for that year was completely destroyed. The house that he had built also received much damage. He was able to make repairs to make

his home as good as new. Their church was destroyed. Donald took on the task to head the re-building of it. With help of some of the church members, he was able to have a new church built within a week. “God has blessed me, and it was the least that I could do.” The following week Donald was baptized. He couldn’t really explain how he felt, but he knew the Lord had moved him in some way.

Every Christmas, Donald and his wife would go on vacation to the mountains. They would take turns driving on the long journey to Pigeon Forge, TN. He and Daisy loved looking at the town decorated for Christmas - Donald’s favorite time of the year. The two would rent a log cabin for the holiday. “It was perfect, watching the snow fall and the fire blaze.” He still receives a new pair of pajamas and a few other gifts each year.

He later restored his old truck that he first bought as a teenager. It became a hobby of his, and it took about five years to complete. Finding original parts and the right coat of paint was the hardest thing to do. He worked on the truck in his spare time, sometimes for hours. It was one thing of his past that he managed to save. Donald doesn’t ever remember his truck looking that good. “It fires right up.” He has also restored some old tractors and other classic vehicles.

Donald and Daisy were married for 50 years on June 7, 1993. Donald planned a surprise anniversary party for his wife. It was a remake of their wedding night, complete with cake and champagne. All of the bridesmaids and groomsmen were there too. With tears in their eyes, they danced to Daisy’s favorite song “As Time Goes By” (from *Casablanca*). It was a night that Donald would never forget.

Five years later, in the winter of 1998, Daisy passed away. She had battled cancer for two years

before the cancer finally won. “She fought long and hard.” Daisy promised Donald that she would wait for him in heaven. Donald is patiently waiting to be reunited with his wife so that they can dance once more.

As for Donald, he has a birthday coming up in August, on which he will turn ninety-one. He is still in excellent health for his age. He lives alone in his house in Roper, where once a week he has a home-health nurse come to check on him. Although alone, he finds plenty to keep him busy. Donald still drives and goes to the farm regularly and gives his nephews a little bit of advice about farming.

Every year on Father’s Day, Donald’s family holds a family reunion. He and his brother Daniel are the only two left from the original “Spencer Family”. They always have a “pig pickin’” complete with homemade desserts. Donald looks forward to the reunion every year because he gets to see his family constantly growing.

It was a privilege to work with Donald on this project. He is a man full of wisdom and looks forward to each day that he is here. Donald has a great story to tell and was glad to see that someone cared about the “olden days.” The waters of the amber colored rivers still run through his veins as he continues his Life on the Pamlico.



# Mary Ann Johnson

*Dear Mama*

SheQuonia Stanley

She is loving and kind. She's my mom and an awesome friend of mine. She's respected and greatly appreciated, and to all her kids, very dedicated. Mary Ann Johnson was born on Sunday, January 12, 1958. She was born at home in Blounts Creek, NC, to the late Mercy Belea Johnson and William Henry Moore. With the help of a loving mid-wife, Lovie Shelton, Mary Ann was born at a healthy weight of 8 lbs. and 5 ounces. Her parents did not live together, but she had the pleasure of having her father live less than a mile down the road. She was her father's only child, so he spoiled her rotten.

Even though there were seven children, the family shared just a one bedroom, old wooden house. The house consisted of the living area, the kitchen, and the bedroom. The family had a modern refrigerator, but they still cooked with the wood stove. The water was supplied by a ground well. Everyone had to haul water in jugs and buckets from the pump to the house. They then heated the water on the stove

for bathing and cooking. The little house was crowded, but it was always clean.

There were two beds in the one bedroom. Some nights Mary Ann said it would be so cold that they had to snuggle up against one another to get warm. Her mother would always cover them each winter night with at least three quilts. "We were tucked so tight, we had to maintain one position all night," she said. Most of the time the girls would sleep in the bedroom with their mom and the boys would sleep in the living area on the couches and the floor. "Mama took so much pride in that lil' house. She made us mop the porch on the weekend."

After their chores were done, the children were able to go next door to Mrs. Stokes to get candy from her store. Mary Ann and her siblings would race through the bushy path to see who would get there first. All of the candy was a penny at that time. Honey buns and sodas were fifteen cents. Mary Ann



would often get more because she was the baby, and her father would give her money also.

Among seven children, Mary Ann was the last born. Awaiting her birth were two brothers, Andrew and William Johnson. There were four sisters—Roxanna, Angeline, Clarisa, and Patricia Johnson. All seven children were delivered with the help of the same midwife. Since Mary Ann was the baby, all of her siblings were highly overprotective of her. Anytime trouble arose in her life, her brothers and sisters would be at her side. Mary Ann handled it very hard when she suffered the loss of her closest sister, Clarisa, on May 4, 1992. Three years later, she lost her youngest brother, William (Bud) on January 9, 1995, due to meningitis. She remembers them every year by cooking a big dinner on each of their birthdays.

In 1964, Mary Ann started the first grade. “I remember my first grade teacher’s name was Mrs. Long. She would beat the stuff out of you, but she would look out for you as well.” Mary Ann loved to go to school to interact with her friends, but she also loved to do Math and English.

Her favorite time of the day in school was P.E. She says she was able to go on the playground and show the boys that she was “just as strong as they were.” Mary Ann was known for beating up boys. She had her first boyfriend in the eighth grade. His name was Curtis Mourning. “On our first date, I had to meet him down the road, so mama wouldn’t see me getting in the car with him.” In the ninth grade, she then met the man who, she didn’t know at the time, would be her husband. His name was Carlton Minor. At the age of 16, Mary Ann had her first child—Rodney. Through it all, she still managed to finish high school in 1976 from Aurora High. At the time of her graduation, Mr. Comegys was the principal. Mary Ann then attended

college in 1983 to practice cosmetology. She enjoyed college, but times got hard, and she had to quit.

In 1976, Mary Ann and Carlton united in holy matrimony while awaiting their second child. Stephanie Minor was born on November 28. On October 25, 1978, I, SheQuonia Minor was born. This marriage ended in divorce in 1981. In 1983, Mary Ann had her fourth child, Quinisha Hamilton, who was born on November 25. In 1989, Mary Ann married Quinisha’s father Hardy Hamilton. On February 4, 1990, LaQuilla Hamilton was the second and last child born from this marriage. She always tried to have another boy, but after four girls straight, she threw in the towel. “Y’all were enough to put up with during my struggles,” she said. She also has eight grandchildren. There are four grand-daughters, Tiffany, Nyteysia, Kateryah, and Rakaya and four grandsons, Marquis, Raquelle, RayQuan, and KeShawn.

“When I was five years old, I was in the field.” Mary Ann worked in the tobacco field and the cucumber fields. She did everything from passing tobacco leaves to tying the leaves on the stick. “I remember how scared I was of the tobacco worms.” She cried almost every day. “I remember one day Lois asked me to come over, and I was a fool to go see what she wanted. She told me to open my hand because she had something for me, and when I did, she put one of those worms in my hand. I was scared to death.” Mary Ann worked in the fields from the age of 5 until 18.

After the fields, she worked in the crab house for many years to come. She would wake up at 4 a.m. to catch the crab van to Washington, NC, to work every morning. “I loved to have my own money,” she said. Working in the crab house became hard for her due to health issues.

She then began driving a school bus in 1986. She enjoyed the kids so much, she got a job in the cafeteria

as a cook. "I was able to keep an eye on y'all at all times." Even when she was in the tobacco fields, she took me, her youngest child at the time to work with her. She would pack my lunch and drinks and she would sit me in the shed strapped in my stroller and tie tobacco leaves. "All the ole' ladies out there loved you," she told me. Back in the day, everyone pulled together to help each other no matter what they had to do.

Having to deal with the hustle of two jobs at one time, Mary Ann still could not make ends meet as a single parent. She then got a position on the clean-up crew at PCS Phosphate. She would drive the bus in the morning, work in the cafeteria all day, and drive the bus in the afternoon. Then she would venture on to her third job which lasted from 5 o'clock p.m. until 12 o'clock a.m. At that time, she made enough money to pay her bills and take care of five children, but she was too tired to spend it on payday. She maintained all three jobs until 2001. All of the work took a toll on her health.

Mary Ann had her share of having fun. During her younger years, she spent a lot of her time at the creek. This was a place in Edward, NC, where several different clubs were located. At the creek, you could dance, drink, eat, and spend time with your significant other. She recalls chasing my father, Carlton every weekend to see if he was with someone else. She told me a time when my father tried to leave her and travel to New York. Mary Ann wanted to go so

bad, but he left her. She said, "I went home and packed my bags, and I jumped right in the car with your Aunt Dot, and I rode all the way to New York with her and found his ass." From that point on, he didn't try to leave her again.

Mary Ann also spent a lot of her time at High Rollers. This was a club that my father worked in for a few years. She danced and had a good time, but she would often have to fight to prove her love for my father. "Men will have you doing crazy things," she stated.

Over the years, entertainment changed because she had children. "We made our fun right there at home," she stated. She and her husband, Hardy, would have weekend cookouts and all of their friends would come. They would play "old school" music, laugh, talk, and play a few games of spades. She recalls the first time that she tried to smoke a cigarette. She said she was so sick that she never wanted to try it again. Not to mention, she choked really badly.

Holidays were always the best times of the year. The family didn't have much money, but they made the best of what they had. Most of the food was straight from the field where Mary Ann's mother grew basically what they needed. They grew collards, squash, beans, salad greens, and much more. Her mom also had several fruit trees in the yard. "We never wanted for fruits." They had apple trees, peach trees, and pear trees. They also had a grapevine.

*She recalls a time when her mom was trying to pick apples to prepare for Thanksgiving and a vine from the tree caught her leg and turned her upside down. She said when she turned around her mama was hanging from the tree.*

All of this food came in handy during the holiday season. “Mama was good for jarring fruit.” Most of the family from other neighborhoods would come over to dine with them for the holidays because Mary Ann’s mama would have the best cooking, not to mention the best tasting desserts. She recalls a time when her mom was trying to pick apples to prepare for Thanksgiving, and a vine from the tree caught her leg and turned her upside down. She said when she turned around her mama was hanging from the tree. It was funny to everyone once they found out she was okay.

Everyone took a turn with preparing the home for the holidays. While the women were in the kitchen, the men were chopping wood for the stove and the heater. “One of us would always have to take the pot out.” The bathing area was to be kept clean at all times. This meant taking waste down a long dirt path and dumping it in the bushes. Mary Ann recalls getting in many fights with her siblings over that chore.

St. Anna Missionary Baptist Church was where Mary Ann attended church as a child. Church was in walking distance from where she and her family lived. No matter what the issue was, it never kept her mother from attending Sunday service every week. They would also have to attend Youth Sunday School. There was no excuse you could give to stay out of church. She recalls wanting to join the choir at an early age. When asked why she wanted to be in the choir so badly, she stated, “I wanted to wear one of those robes so bad.” She joined the choir at the age of seven. She told me that back then, there was just the choir. They didn’t have a piano, drums, or a microphone at the time. The music was made with your mouth, hands, and feet. She remained at that church all of her childhood.

In 1992, Mary Ann met a nice man by the name of Pastor Joseph V. Squires. He became a very good friend and counselor to her. She was then persuaded to join the St. Peter’s Missionary Baptist Church. At this church, she felt at home. I was told that the church was more spiritually encouraging. There were more things to offer to her children also. She is currently a member at this church. She is a member of the choir and the treasury board. There are many activities that the church offers to couples also. They have an event every year called the “couples retreat.” This gives couples the opportunity to go on a vacation and enjoy quality time without the children. They also have planned trips for the children. Scholarships are given to the ones who participate in church and make good grades. Today, she still faithfully attends church, and she often visits the ones who are too sick to make it to church.

While attending this church, Mary Ann met her third husband, Larry Earle. They dated for years before marriage. In 1998, Pastor Joseph Squires presided over their holy matrimony. He helped them in every way that he could. They would often attend church together throughout the years. In 2008, Pastor Squires passed away due to a stroke that he never recovered from. With his encouraging words, Mary Ann kept God and prayer in her heart.

She and Larry Earle never had any children together, but strangely, they shared the same granddaughter. Mary Ann married her grand-daughter’s grandfather. She and her husband lived happily until the day they found out that he was diagnosed with lung cancer. She was a very strong woman. She took care of him until his last breath. Larry Earle departed from her life on August 12, 2010. She stayed by his bedside the whole while he was sick. The hardest time for her during this period was the last day.

Mary Ann left the hospital room to go to one of her daughter's house to freshen up. When she got to the waiting area of the hospital, she realized that her ride wasn't there yet, so she got back on the elevator to go back up to Larry's room. Once she stepped off the elevator, she realized that his curtain was closed. "I felt it in my heart that he was gone right then," she said. That's when a nurse came and placed her hand on Mary Ann's shoulder and told her that he was gone. The nurse stated that she knew Mary Ann was hurt, but she knew he wasn't hurting anymore. She found comfort in the nurse's statement. The nurse told her that sometimes loved ones do not feel comfortable passing away with others around. She said that Larry did not want her to see him go.

Mary Ann has struggled with her weight almost all of her adult life. She tried everything in her power to try and lose weight but she could never reach her goal because of her health issues. She has three slipped disks in her back. She has been in and out of the doctor's office for years to see what she could do to fix the problem. Surgery was not one of the options that she was willing to undergo. She, as well as the doctor, thought it would be helpful to lose some weight to see if this would alleviate some of the pain in her back. Though the diets wouldn't work, and she couldn't exercise due to the pain, doctors came up with another solution. She was scheduled to have a different type of surgery. In April 2010, she had the gastric bypass surgery. This surgery is a process of making the stomach smaller, making it harder for a person to consume large quantities of food. She was in the hospital for four days until she was released. Since the surgery, she has lost a tremendous amount of weight.

Mary Ann is able to do things now that she was not able to do for a long time. She has more confidence in herself, and she has a higher self-esteem.

Since the surgery, she has changed her eating habits, and she is able to exercise on a daily basis. "I remember when I was ashamed to show any skin," she said. Now she shops all the time. She is happy at this point in her life. When asked if she would ever marry again, she said, "Not in a million years." She enjoys her home that she is in now.

She now resides in Chocowinity, NC, with one of her younger daughters and two of her grandchildren. All of the hard work that she contributed throughout the years has paid off. She is living in a four bedroom, two bath home with a nice big yard. After fighting for her disability from 2004 until 2009, she was finally awarded her pay. She was able to start over in a new community. She spends a lot of her time doing for others. If she's not giving rides, she's going to make sure family and friends are okay.

Mary Ann loves spending time with her children and grandchildren whenever the opportunity arises. She makes the time almost every weekend to cook big dinners and invite all of her children and grandchildren over to eat. She really enjoys cooking now a lot more than before. She says if she cooked the food then she would be less tempted to eat it. If the church is having a function or a friend is having a cookout, she is the first to prepare a dish. She enjoys cooking beans, chicken, and fish, and her favorite is chicken salad. She loves to plant her vegetables such as tomatoes, squash, and salad.

If she isn't planting vegetables, she is planting flowers. She has been a flower lover since she was a child. She has not always been able to grow flowers. Over the years, she has acquired a green thumb. Her favorite flowers are the azaleas. Every Mother's Day, she tells all her children that she wants a beautiful flower. She says, "Give me my flowers while I'm



living.” Springtime is her favorite time of the year despite the fact that she is afraid of caterpillars and lizards. She stated that she marked one of her children, me, by being so afraid of things. She was terrified of cats and kittens.

When Mary Ann was pregnant with me, she was frightened when a cat rubbed against her leg. She explained to me that this was one reason I am so afraid of cats. She also remembers the times when her brothers used to chase her with cats when she was a little girl. Before she sets out to plant her flowers and vegetables, she has to make sure that there are not any cats around. She also gives a very good inspection of her little garden for the caterpillars before she puts her hand in it. “I’ve been scared like that before,” she said. She does not hang her clothes on the line now because she brought a couple of lizards in the house on the clothes one day, and she didn’t know it. As she was folding the clothes, the lizards ran across the bed. She tore the room up trying to get out of the house. It’s been hard to get her to hang clothes on the line since that day. She finally has a home with a dryer hookup. That is one reason she is thankful for her home today.

She spends much of her time decorating her home as well as her yard. She loves to make curtains and table cloths for different occasions. She is always looking for new ideas to make her home more beautiful. When she’s not making decorations for the house she is cleaning and dusting. She instilled the importance of cleanliness in her children as well. Mary Ann is a firm believer in keeping a clean house and proper hygiene.

She did the very best she could to raise her children and teach her children right from wrong. Throughout her life, she struggled to make ends meet,

but through it all, she didn’t have to have money to show her children that she loved them deeply. She worked hard, and she was able to provide her children with everything they needed and a lot of what they wanted. She never complained. Sometimes her children would lie in bed at night and hear her cry, but when asked what was wrong, she would always say, “Everything is going to be alright in due time.”

As time passed and her children got older, things started to brighten up for her. Now that all of her children are grown, she enjoys sitting back and letting them take care of her. She is a great mom and grandmother. Though she has raised all of her children, she still gives a helping hand in raising her grandchildren. She has always had a tight connection with her grandsons because she only had one son herself. She tries to make time for them all, but she enjoys keeping her grandson, RayQuan. She was upset when she found out that her grandson Raquelle was a diabetic. She wasn’t able to keep him as much because she could not administer his shots. She still spends a lot of time supporting all of them in their school activities. Thanks to her, not one of her grandchildren had to attend daycare. She has always supported her children in whatever way she could. No matter what time of the day or night, she is there when we need her. When discipline was needed, she never hesitated to put the belt to us.

She had so many hard times over the years, but despite the bad times, the good times overpowered them. Mary Ann is content with where she is in life. She loves the fact that she can sit back and see the fruits of her labor living their lives and raising their children. “I’ve raised y’all the best that I knew how. Now all I can do is keep guiding you,” she stated.

# Lynda Leigh Williams Woolard

*Rooted in Family*

Kimberly Woolard

*P*hil and Lola Williams both grew up in Pinetown, North Carolina. They met each other when they started elementary school. By high school they had become sweethearts. Lola was a sweet, shy girl who fell in love with a charming jokester. They were both very hard workers. The couple shared many interests like painting, religion, and being outside in the sun. In eleventh grade, Phil dropped out of school to join the Navy. Lola wanted to finish school, so they waited until she graduated to get married. They moved to California where Phil was stationed. After Phil finished his service, they moved back to Pinetown to start a Family.

On January 31, 1960 Phil and Lola Williams



*Lynda in School*

welcomed their second bundle of joy. They named their newborn daughter after the newly-crowned Miss America Lynda Lee. They chose to change the spelling to Lynda Leigh. Lynda's four year old sister Pat was excited to have a sister to play with. When the family left Beaufort County Hospital, they headed home to Pinetown to settle in. Four years later the proud parents welcomed a third and final child, a daughter named

Gina. The young family was living in a small town and would witness a changing society.

The Williams family was very close and obviously sheltered living in such a small rural town. Most of the people around Pinetown were farmers. This community was very close knit, and everyone

knew each other; it was a very trusting environment.

Growing up, the girls would walk with their classmates to their elementary school about a mile down the road. While children, Lynda and her sisters often found themselves playing in their grandfather's antique store right down the road from their house. This antique store inspired the girls to love history, and this stuck with them for their whole lives. Pat eventually opened her own shop in downtown Washington, coincidentally where her family used to come for daytrips.

After moving back to Pinetown, Phil got a job as a shift worker which allowed him to save up some money for much needed restorations on the house. With three young girls running around, Phil and Lola decided to add on to their two-bedroom home. Phil and his friends did the work themselves. Phil did a lot of the work because he was a decent wood craftsman. The family enjoyed the upgrade to a four bedroom house with running water and best of all—a bathroom.

Lynda especially enjoyed this new bathroom having recalled a time when she was in the outhouse and a snake

slithered in. Lynda mentioned that life without cell phones and computers and an inside bathroom did not

bother people. "No one knew any better, we all got along just fine without mp3 players and 300 TV channels. All we needed was food, water, and a good roof over our heads." Just as their house was changing, the Williams family noticed that the world was changing, too.

Lynda was in second grade when her class was first segregated. She does not recall any incidents and mentioned that everyone for the most part got along. She also

recalled that the teachers could discipline children at school. Often, if you misbehaved, this punishment would come in three's. First, the teacher would spank you; then, your mother would spank you when you got home from school. And when your father got home from work, you would get another spanking for good measure. Lynda only recalls this happening to herself once, though for Gina it was a common occurrence.

Because of all the violent movements and the assassinations going on in the world, the family tried not to watch the TV too often. Phil and Lola wanted to monitor what the young girls saw on



*Lynda, Gina, & Pat*

*First, the teacher would spank you; then, your mother would spank you when you got home from school. And when your father got home from work, you would get another spanking for good measure.*

television. "Back then, we only had three channels, and our TV did not have color," said Lynda. Phil and Lola wanted their children to grow up as respectful, hardworking, and smart Christians. They were taught to be kind and courteous to others. Lynda was very shy to people she was not familiar with.

Her sisters Pat and Gina were very outgoing, and Gina was prone to troublemaking.

To stay grounded, the family often worked together in their garden, played sports together, and attended Rosemary Church. The family would occasionally go on vacation to the mountains or the beach. They would never stay more than a couple of days because Phil and Lola did not like being away from the house that long. "Back then, it was a real treat to get to go to Washington for the day. We would go window shopping downtown and go to Little Mint to eat," Lynda recalled with a smile. Now, Lynda goes to Washington almost every day. This seems ironic to her that what used to be a treat is now part of her everyday life. "Usually those trips were to reward good behavior or good school work."

Lynda had no trouble with school work and confessed to being a teacher's pet. She always had her nose in a book and was eager to learn - whether she was learning how to work in the tobacco fields in the summer or learning how to do algebra. Lynda was excited for her future and knew she wanted a good education. She was a natural in school. She knew she

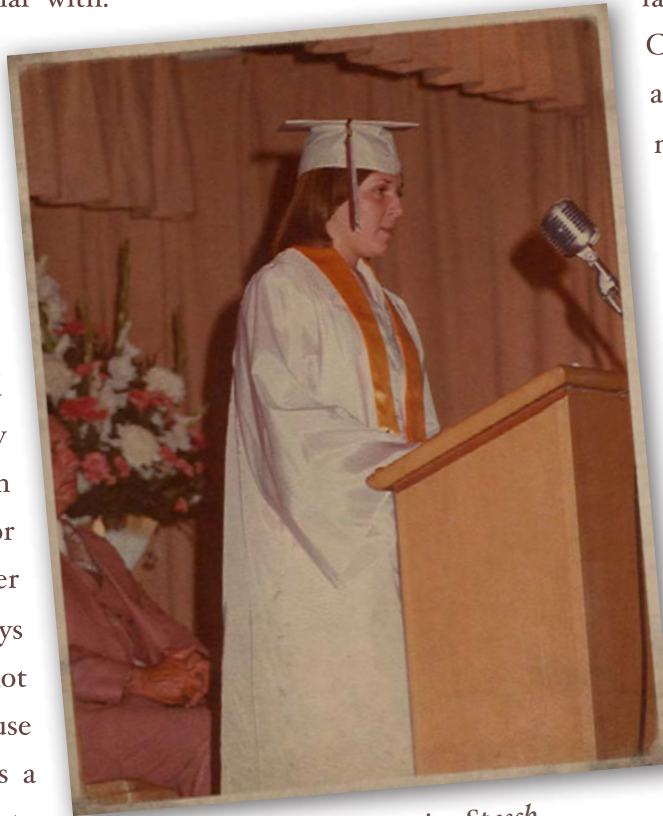
wanted a higher education after high school, but the family simply did not have enough money. Lynda realized she would need a scholarship to pay tuition. She worked extremely hard and graduated valedictorian of her class. She was accepted into the

family's favorite school - UNC at Chapel Hill. Lynda was awarded a scholarship from Texasgulf, now known as PCS.

When Lynda moved into her dorm room in Chapel Hill, she realized things were changing. She noticed that the people attending UNC were from all over the world, not just places like conservative Pinetown. Needless to say, Lynda felt a severe culture shock. She described it as an educational experience that helped her to be more open and less shy. It was naturally hard to be away from home sometimes, but luckily, Lynda

and a friend figured out a carpool agreement for weekend visits back home. College really had an impact on her. She looks back on those years as some of the best of her life. While attending UNC, Lynda got reacquainted with someone very important she had met in grade school.

When Lynda began third grade, she met Rodney Woolard. He was a new kid in school who was in the fifth grade. His parents had just moved back into town after his dad finished his tour with the army. Rodney and Lynda knew each other through high school but not very well. They also attended Rosemary Church of Christ where Lynda and Rodney first started talking.



*Lynda's Valedictorian Speech*



They began dating during Lynda's sophomore year in college. After completing her degree in teaching, Rodney and Lynda got married. They moved to the mountains where Rodney was offered a job. After a few months, they realized they wanted to move closer home.

Rodney was offered a job with the USDA office in Washington, NC, which is about twenty minutes from Pinetown. The couple moved into a small rental house in town. The newlyweds were very happy to be back close to home.

Soon after moving back, Lynda got a job as a teacher's assistant at Eastern Elementary school in Washington. She was soon promoted to a full time position as a first grade teacher. At first, she was not sure she wanted kids of her own. Lynda invested a lot of time and money on her school children, and she was not sure if she wanted to start her own family.

In 1985, Lynda changed her mind about starting a family when her sister Gina gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. Lynda's baby niece Samantha became the apple of the family's eye, so to speak. Lynda and Rodney started saving money to make sure they could financially take care of a baby. The couple was very cognizant of the time they would need to invest in their expanding family. When the couple felt ready to take on the responsibility of children, they found out that Lynda was pregnant.

In April of 1987, Lynda gave birth to a healthy baby boy. The excited and nervous first time parents named their newborn son Joshua Ryan Woolard. The new family moved into a cozy rental house right down



*Rodney & Lynda*

the road from Rosemary Church of Christ. The house was a five minute drive in either direction from both Rodney and Lynda's parents' houses. Josh and Samantha were very happy babies and were close cousins. As Josh grew, and Gina also was expanding her family, Rodney and Lynda considered having another child. They

realized they would need more space for a toddler and a newborn to grow.

When Rodney's grandfather passed away, he left the family his house. Rodney's parents Earl and Alma had built a new house right across the road from this house. Rodney asked Earl if they could move into the house since they were planning on expanding their family. Earl was much obliged to let them move in. Rodney and Lynda moved their belongings five minutes down the road to their new house. While moving, Lynda found out there was a higher paying job as a second grade teacher open. This occurred right at the time Eastern Elementary split into two schools. Eastern would now only teach kindergarten and first grade. Second and third grade would move into a new building named John Cotton Tayloe. Right after

moving into the new school building, Lynda found out she was pregnant with another child.

In July of 1991, Lynda was eight and a half months pregnant when she went into labor. After suffering rapid drops of iron and blood sugar, her doctor decided it was time for the baby to come. Lynda and Rodney's large extended family was anxiously waiting in the family waiting room. She went into an emergency surgery to deliver her baby. The family was starting to get worried when the proud father announced that there was a new baby girl in the family. Both Lynda and the baby were healthy.

They named their new born baby girl Kimberly Elaine Woolard after one of Rodney's two sisters that had passed away. This meant a lot to Rodney's parents. It helped bring both sides of Rodney and Lynda's family together even stronger than they already were. This made it easy for the large extended families to celebrate holidays and birthdays together. Also, the fact that everyone attended the same church made the families bond grow. Lynda felt very blessed to have such a close family.

Meanwhile, four year old Josh was excited to have a little sister, though he probably wanted a brother. Josh wanted someone to roughhouse with but was going to make do with a sister. As her children were growing, they were a handful and often got each

other into trouble. Josh and Kimberly became partners in crime.

The children spent a lot of time running around outside and playing at their grandparents house across the street. The family had pets to teach the children responsibility. Rodney's younger brother, Timothy, moved back into his parent's house while saving up for

an apartment after pharmacy school. Uncle Tim was had a major role in the children's lives as he was 10 years younger than Rodney and often found it easy to be a kid along with his niece and nephew. The family ate supper and often breakfast at "Grandma and Granddaddy's house."

After years of planning, Rodney and Lynda saved up enough money to build a new house. They bought the lot beside their current home.

Lynda had always dreamed of designing a home of her own. Lynda and Rodney picked out a floor plan and hired a construction crew to build their dream home. With children the ages of ten and six, the family began moving into their newly completed house. Lynda invested herself into making this home a comfortable haven for her children. The family has had a lot of memorable moments and experiences in this house. Lynda and Rodney still live in this house with their family. Lynda hopes to keep it as her home "for as long as God permits."



*Rodney, Lynda, Josh, & Kimberly*

Lynda is now happily two years from retiring from school. She is looking forward to having some rest and relaxation. She is happy to be in a loving committed relationship with Rodney. She feels blessed to have two healthy well behaved children. She is proud of the strong bond her family has. Lynda is still a strong Christian woman who enjoys reading and learning new things. She also enjoys antique shows with her sisters, and every week, she has dinner with

her mother and sisters. Lynda is a thoughtful, loving, generous woman with strong family roots. She loves children especially her own. Lynda gives every indication she will continue to be loving and generous throughout her lifetime. Her children and husband are very proud of her and are appreciative for all she does for them. Lynda will always be special to her family and friends and will have left a good example to those who meet her.



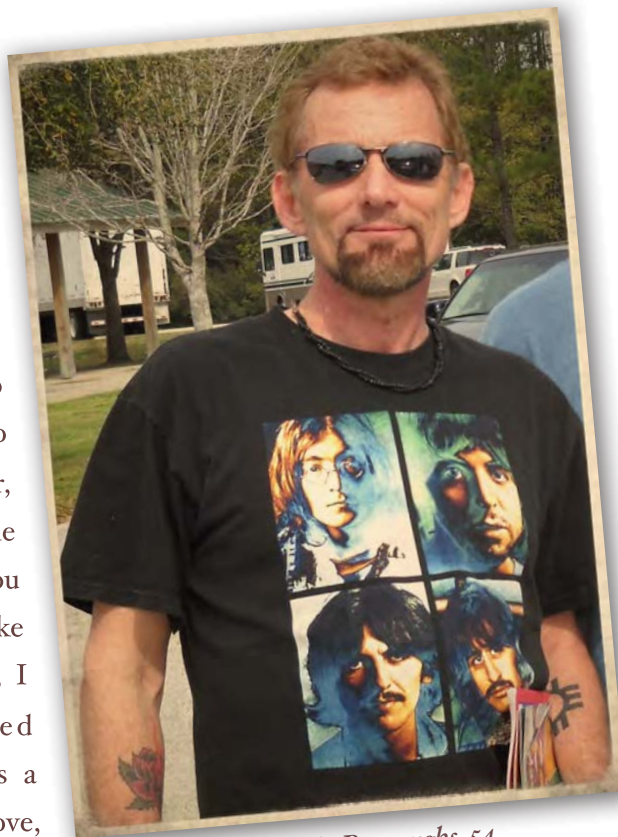
# Curtis L. Burroughs

## *My Other Father*

Madison Harrell

As I sat nervously on my couch, preparing to interview Curtis Burroughs, who I consider my second father, about his life, he looked at me sheepishly and said, “How do you want to begin? Shall we begin like David Copperfield? I am born, I grow up.” We both laughed because the last two lines is a quote from a movie we both love, *Interview with the Vampire*. From that point on, my nerves eased. I knew things were going to turn out just fine.

In the wee hours of March 25, 1957, on a foggy spring night, Curtis L. Burroughs Jr. and his wife, Estelle Radcliffe Burroughs, welcomed their first child, Curtis L. Burroughs III into the world at the old Taylor Hospital in Washington, North Carolina. Curt, as he is known by most people, is the oldest of four



*Curtis L. Burroughs, 54*

children. He has two sisters, Alana and Felicia, and a deceased brother, Tony.

At the time of Curt's birth, his parents lived in a two bedroom home located on Pungo Creek at Sidney Crossroads. In his first few years, Curt's father was employed as a meat cutter at the Colonial Grocery Store located in Belhaven, and his mother was a stay at home mom. During this period, Curt spent much of his time on his grandparent's farm, located about six miles away in a small rural community called Free Union. Some of his fondest childhood memories revolve around growing up on his grandparent's small farm.

As he recalls, “It was quite fun growing up on the farm. There were always plenty of things to do.”



During the summer, there was tobacco farming and all the activities that went with it, and afternoon swims in Pungo Creek on hot summer days. He remembers as a small boy, getting into the chicken coop and chasing his grandmother's chickens, much to her chagrin. She would holler, "Boy, if you don't stop chasing those chickens they ain't gonna lay no eggs!" His grandfather Sammy had a mean and ornery old bull that loved to chase him. "I was scared of him," remembers Curt. "He was huge and very intimidating, as he would snort and kick dust." One day the old bull made the mistake of running at his grandfather, who, with a shovel in hand, hit the bull square between the eyes. The bull fell over with a loud thud. He never made the mistake of running after his grandfather again, but he never gained any respect for Curt.

There were other animals on the farm that Curt grew fond of. "I had a pet duck. I can't remember his name, but he was killed when my grandfather's bird dog trapped him in a shed and caused him to have a heart attack. My grandmother was so upset she told my Uncle Wayne to take the dog out and shoot him. When my grandfather found out, he was livid. He said, 'I had over a thousand dollars invested in that dog!' He was angry for weeks." Curt also remembers having a pony.

"He was so mean, that he would bite you. So granddaddy got rid of him." There were other farm animals such as pigs and a milk cow.

His granddaddy would sell most of the pigs at the market, but some of them he would kill and have butchered. "Grandma had an old smoke house where she would cure the hams and make air-dried sausage. It was great stuff. She, being a farmer's wife, cooked three meals a day. There were eggs from the hen house, sausage, bacon, or ham taken from the smoke house, and fresh milk taken from the dairy cow. Much of the food was grown in my grandma's garden or came from the farm animals. My grandparents were very self-sufficient people."

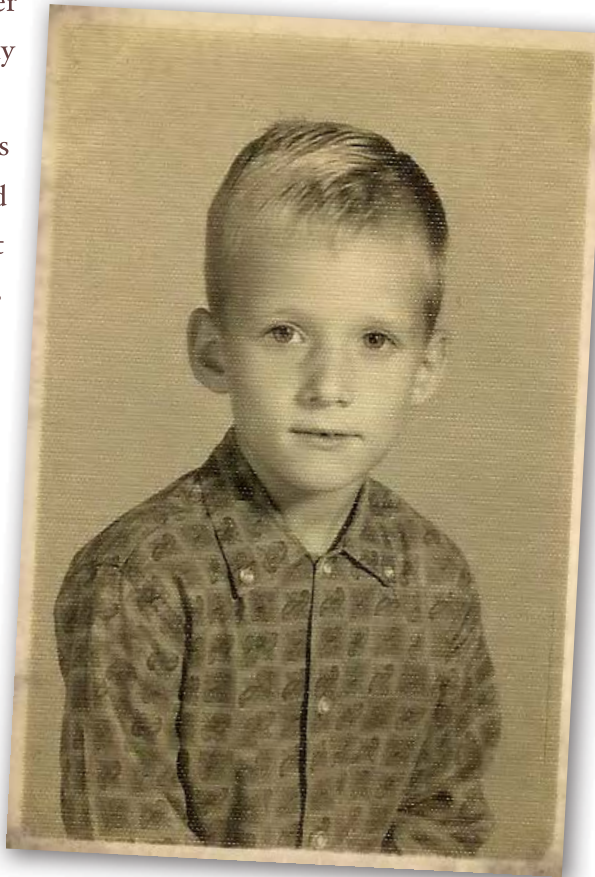
Curt cherishes the time he spent with his grandparents on the farm. He says, "My grandmother was a very wise woman. She instilled in me a lot of the

values I have today, such as honesty and trust, not taking what doesn't belong to you, and good hygiene. She always made sure my ears were clean," he laughingly recalls. The good times on the farm seemed short-lived to Curt, because during the summer before starting the third grade, he moved to Wake Forest with his mother, father, younger sister Alana, and younger brother Tony.

His father took a job as a mechanical draftsman for a company in Raleigh, and his mother began working at a pharmaceutical plant, also in Raleigh. During this time, Wake

Forest was a sleepy little town about twelve miles outside of Raleigh.

Many of the towns' people commuted back and forth to Raleigh, as did his parents. Curt attended



*Curt at Six*

elementary school there from the beginning of the third until the end of the fifth grade. “What I remember most about this period of my life was going to the high school football games with my friends. We didn’t actually see much of the game because we were too busy making footballs out of empty drink cups, so that we could have our own football games. Many a Friday night I came home after the game bloody, dirty, and with a torn shirt.”

Having just completed the fifth grade and on summer vacation at his grandparents, his parents, having returned from vacation in Florida visiting relatives, called him and announced that the family was moving to Florida. Curt was saddened by this news because he would now be far away from his grandparents. In 1968, Curt started the sixth grade in his new home of Altamonte Springs, Florida. The sadness he felt leaving North Carolina didn’t last long. “I was absolutely fascinated by Florida. There was so much to do like going to the beach, going to the many tourist attractions, and hanging out with my cousins, Debbie and DeDe.” Starting at a new school was easy for him because his youngest cousin, DeDe was in the same grade and her friends became his friends. “I was instantly popular because my cousin was popular.” An interesting point he remembers was being able to wear short sleeved shirts to school all year long because the weather stayed warm. There weren’t many cold days during the winter like there was back in North Carolina.

During the summer, Curt and his cousins made extra money mowing yards and weeding flower beds. They would go to the matinees at the local theatres and shop for records at the record stores. “I developed a deep interest in music during that time. I would listen to Jimi Hendrix, The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, and many other rock bands.” He remembers

seeing the masses of people streaming into a concert in Woodstock, New York on the evening news. It was an event that proved to be a pivotal point in the lives of many of the young people in his generation. Also on the evening news was constant coverage of the Vietnam War.

He remembers news footage showing many wounded and dead soldiers lying on the battle fields of Vietnam. He recalls, “The news footage was very graphic, not like we’ve seen in wars that came after Vietnam. I think that the United States government learned that covering the war as it was done in Vietnam was very upsetting to the American people. I remember a few scenes vividly from those days. One showed a South Vietnamese army officer executing a North Vietnamese spy right on television.” Curt had witnessed the execution of a human being while sitting in his living room watching television.” This left him with a very sick feeling in his stomach. This was a time of great social change in this country. There were race riots in many of the cities across the country. There were massive protests against the Vietnam War and much upheaval at college campuses. During this time many of the social norms were challenged. This was a time of free love, hippy communes, and a lot of experimentation with mind altering substances, as Curt recalls.

“But my time in Florida was interrupted upon receiving news that my grandmother was diagnosed with terminal cancer.” This tragic news caused Curt’s mother to decide to relocate the family to Greenville, North Carolina, so she could be close to her dying mother. Curt finished out the eighth grade at E.B. Aycock Junior High School. He found it more difficult to make new friends at his new school, because unlike Florida, most of these students had been together since the first grade. “In those days, Greenville was not

the thriving city it is today, it was basically a small college town,” Curt says.

In the ninth grade, Curt’s parents bought a new house and moved into a new neighborhood where he met many new friends. He and his new friends found a log cabin in the woods and would spend many nights camping out. During school months, they would hunt in the woods near the cabin and sleep in it on weekends. “It had an old wood heater in it, and that kept us warm at night,” he remembers. During the summer months, they fished and swam all day in the creeks, ponds, and Tar River.

In the fall of 1973, Curt entered his first year of high school, attending, J. H. Rose. He regrets not applying himself in high school. He focused most of his time on girls, hanging out downtown, and going to concerts. He became disillusioned with school and quit in the twelfth grade. “I look back now and realize how shortsighted I was, not thinking about what kind of future I would have without an education.” After a year of hanging out with friends and doing nothing constructive with his life, he decided to return to school.

In the summer of 1976, he began studying for his G.E.D. at Pitt Community College, or Pitt Technical College, as it was known back then. “It only took me three months to pass all the exams,” he recalls. After receiving his G.E.D., he enrolled into the computer science program at Pitt Community College. In his final semester, he began a work/study program at Long Manufacturing Company in Tarboro. “My job was

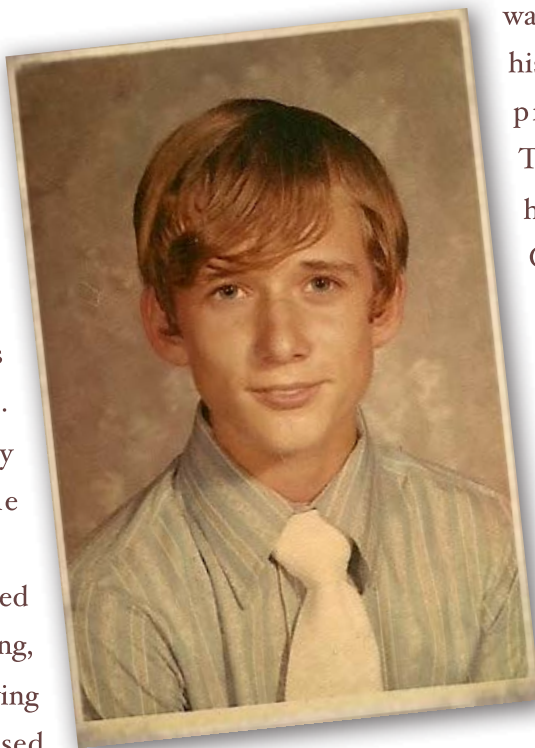
being a part-time computer operator, and after a few months they offered me a full-time position.” Within a six-month period, his boss offered him an entry level

computer programming position. This was a great opportunity for him since his goal was to become a computer programmer. Curt relocated to Tarboro in 1978, and in April of 1979, he married Linda Sasser of Greenville, North Carolina.

On June 25, 1980, Curt and Linda had their first son, David Nathan Burroughs. He recalls that being a new father at the age of twenty-three was quite a scary thing. “I didn’t feel that I was mature enough to be raising a child. I realized I had a lot to learn.” The next several years were very hectic for him, trying to balance being a husband, father,

and trying to advance in a fast-paced computer profession. He remembers being very tired during this period of time but he just attributed it to being so busy. He was later to understand exactly why he was feeling so fatigued.

The year 1982 brought about a period of great opportunity and great turmoil in Curt’s life. In January of that year, Curt interviewed for a programming position at Burroughs Welcome Pharmaceutical Company, in Greenville, North Carolina. During this time, his wife was pregnant with their second son, Daniel Paul Burroughs. His due date was for some time in April, but in March, Curt was offered the programming position at Burroughs Welcome, which meant that to keep insurance coverage, Curt couldn’t start work until after his wife gave birth to Daniel.



*Curt's Freshman Year*



Fortunately, everything worked out fine. Daniel was born April 17, 1982, and Curt was able to begin work at the new company.

In May, the family relocated to Greenville. However, there was a major complication involving Curt's health. Potential candidates at Burroughs Welcome were required to pass a medical exam, which Curt didn't think he would have any problem passing. However, at the medical exam review, the doctor informed Curt that he had a serious liver disease, for which there was no cure. "The doctor told me that it was a very slow developing disease, and it wouldn't interfere with my work duties until many years later, so he recommended hiring me with the stipulation that I couldn't work in the actual manufacturing processing of the drugs." The doctor recommended that Curt see a liver specialist as soon as possible.

At his first visit to the liver specialist, the doctor informed Curt that there weren't any treatment options available, except for a liver transplant. However, in the doctor's opinion this hopefully wouldn't be necessary until sometime way down the road. "He recommended a low protein and sodium diet, which he said would put less stress on my liver. He also strongly recommended that I not drink any alcoholic beverages, which would speed the onset of my liver complications." Curt also found out that his problem with fatigue was related to the liver disease and would be something that would continue to get worse over time. Curt stated that he really didn't understand the

full import of the information that the doctor gave him and didn't see what the big deal was because he felt fine, except for the fatigue. In years to come, Curt would really understand the seriousness of his medical condition. But for now, all that was required was regular visits to the doctor for blood work to monitor the progression of the disease. A minor inconvenience, Curt surmised.

Curt advanced rapidly in the Information Technology Department at Burroughs Welcome. This was a very exciting time in his career. He was promoted from computer programmer to systems analyst, and eventually became a computer database administrator. "I was able to do a lot of traveling, attending computer and database classes all across the country. I traveled to many exciting places such as New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Dallas, and New Orleans, to name a few. I had never traveled to

many places before and it was a huge learning experience seeing different parts of the country and meeting a wide diversity of people." He soon learned that his traveling would have to be curtailed because Linda was pregnant with their third child.

On February 23, 1987, Curt and Linda's third son,

Darren Thomas Burroughs was born.

Curt was busier now than ever: three sons, a wife, and a challenging career. As if he weren't busy enough, thirty-five year old Curt decided, in the fall of 1992, to pursue a bachelor's degree in Business Administration at East Carolina University. Burroughs Welcome encouraged their employees to further their education



*Curt, Linda, David, & Daniel*



and made it easy to do so by paying for tuition and books upon the successful completion of classes. The company also allowed flexibility in attending classes during work hours as long as the employee made up the time. "I enjoyed my time spent at East Carolina, and I made very good grades. My favorite subjects were not those associated with my major. I especially enjoyed my literature classes. I have always loved reading and composition, and I did extremely well in these classes." After a few semesters, Curt's busy schedule began to take a toll on his health.

The liver specialists at UNC Memorial Hospital explained to Curt and Linda that his liver condition was getting worse. "I was already beginning to have other symptoms besides fatigue, such as bleeding problems, constant nausea, and fainting spells." The doctors informed them that at some point in the foreseeable future, he would have to undergo a liver transplant operation. This was a frightening prospect for Curt and his family. "I think at the time, neither me nor my wife could fully grasp the news we were hearing. I guess we were sort of in denial that such drastic actions would be required any time soon." For the most part, Curt continued his busy schedule, although there were increased hospital stays related to his worsening condition.

In the fall of 1997, the liver specialists told Curt that it was time for him to be placed on the liver transplant list. "My wife, I don't think, could really come to terms with this. My health placed a terrible strain on our marriage. Because of this and other factors, we agreed to separate." Curt moved into a condominium in Greenville, not far from Linda and the kids. He was still able to perform his duties at work, but he had to give up attending classes at ECU. "It was just too much for me, so I began to simplify my life by cutting out unnecessary demands upon my

time." He spent weekends with his sons, and the remainder of the time, he tried to get as much rest as he possibly could. Towards the end of the year, Linda and the children moved to Sneads Ferry, North Carolina. After the move, Curt was only able to see his sons every other weekend.

In the spring of 1998, Curt began working on a project at work with an old friend, Toni Harrell. "We had known each other since we were teenagers because we had many of the same friends." In May, they began dating. A few months later, Curt moved in with her and her eight year old daughter, Madison, in Bethel, North Carolina. "Not being able to spend much time with my own kids, Madison and I grew very close. She was in a similar situation as my boys, because she only saw her father every other weekend. When she was nine, I took her and her mother to see the Rolling Stones." This was the first of many concerts he would take her to see. He enjoyed sharing his love for music with her. He tried to spend as much quality time as he could with his new family and his boys, but his liver condition made this increasingly hard. The liver condition and its symptoms grew worse, causing more frequent hospital stays and many days out of work.

In the fall of 1998, the liver specialists at UNC Memorial Hospital told Curt that he had only a few months to live unless he received the liver transplant. "A few weeks before Thanksgiving, I was driving home and I blacked out at the wheel of my truck. I woke up in the median of the highway sweating and shaking. I waited for a while in the median trying to gather myself before I continued home." This was frightening to Curt and his whole family. After discussing what had just occurred with his family, he realized that he could no longer work. The next day he called his boss and told her that he would not be back at work. She

told him not to worry about anything concerning work and to concentrate all his efforts on getting the transplant, so he could get well.

On January 5, 1999, around 10:00 P.M., Curt received a call that a donor liver was waiting for him at UNC Memorial Hospital. He was told to report there as soon as possible. His mother and step-father picked him up in Bethel and drove him to the hospital. He checked in around 2:30 A.M. the next morning, and they began prepping him for surgery. "The experience was kind of surreal. I wasn't really afraid. I guess I had a feeling everything was going to be okay." He was wheeled into the surgical unit around 8:00 A.M.

The surgery lasted almost nine hours. He doesn't remember much immediately after the surgery, only brief glimpses of his mother, Estelle standing beside him crying and smiling as he drifted in and out of consciousness. It took about twelve hours for him to fully regain consciousness and realize that the surgery was a success.

Over the next few days, many of Curt's family and friends visited him in the hospital. He began physical therapy in preparation for his release, fifteen days later. In addition to learning to walk with a cane, he was instructed on the types of foods he would be able to eat, along with the medications he was required to take. He was released from the hospital on January 21, 1999. He could not return to his house in

Bethel for recovery because it was connected to a well and he had to have treated water. It was decided that he would spend his recovery time with his sister, Felicia, in Bath.

For the next month, a home health nurse visited him every day to change his bandages and check his progress. A month later, he was able to return to his home in Bethel with Toni and Madison.

Towards the end of March, Curt was able to return to work on a part-time basis. By the end of April, he was working full time. "Everything was returning to normal, and I was glad to be back at work."

In March of 2000, Curt and Toni decided to move to Washington, North Carolina so he could be closer to his family. "I was moving back to Beaufort County, where I was born and had spent my early childhood years. It felt good to be home." The liver transplant had been a complete success but years of

liver disease had taken a toll on Curt's physical and mental well-being.

In 2004, he put in for his disability and discontinued working. It took three long years for him to receive his disability benefits from social security. In 2007, after his disability benefits came into effect, he decided to move even closer to his family in Free Union. Though now separated from Toni, he continued living in Free Union with his step-daughter Madison, who is a sophomore at Beaufort Community

*A few weeks before Thanksgiving, I was driving home and I blacked out at the wheel of my truck. I woke up in the median of the highway sweating and shaking. I waited for a while in the median trying to gather myself before I continued home."*

College, where she majors in Liberal Arts. His youngest son Darren is a junior at East Carolina University, majoring in Business Administration. Daniel, his middle son, lives in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. His oldest son David is married and lives in Jacksonville, North Carolina. He spends as much time with them as possible.

Curt, my “other father,” having come so close to death, tries to live each day to its fullest. He has a

deeper appreciation for the blessings bestowed upon us in life and realizes what a precious gift it is. His story shows that there is no greater power than the will to live and he is truly an inspiration to those faced with the consequences of life threatening diseases.

Today you will find him and me living down Free Union Church Road along with our two small dogs, Bella and Macy, just a few miles away from the farm he so loved as a child.




*Curt & Madison*

# Carrie Godley-Thomas

*It's a good feeling to be loved.*

Camille Godley

 On Sunday April 10, 2011, Carrie Godley-Thomas was blessed to have celebrated her one hundred and second birthday - an age that not many people in this world will ever get a chance to experience. Family and friends came from everywhere to visit the “living pioneer” of the Godley family. She is called this because out of all of her siblings, aunts and uncles, and even a great majority of her nieces and nephews, she has out lived them all. Even though her body is weakened by age, she continues to be young at heart. She continues to love and trust the Lord with all her heart. This article is about a high-spirited woman who continues to live a gracious and abundant life full of happiness, blessings, and faded sorrow.

Carrie's parents, Ezekiel Godley and Sarah



*Carrie Godley-Thomas, 101 years-old*

Bryant-Godley, were married on February 24, 1898, in Beebe Chapel CME Church. Ezekiel was twenty-three and Sarah was nineteen years old. Ezekiel was the son of Caesar Augustus Godley and Mary Satterwaite-Godley, who were slaves. Caesar was given his name after being sold into slavery. All that is known of him is that he was

described as a “Guinea Man.” While this continues to be researched, it is proposed that he was captured and sold from New Guinea. Ezekiel and Sarah raised eight children together. Barely able to read and write, Ezekiel and Sarah's only occupation was that of tenant farmers or “share cropping.” Share cropping was designed to work out labor deals between white land owners and former slaves. Under this arrangement, laborers with no land of their own worked on farm



plots, and at the end of the season, land owners paid workers a share of the crop.

Carrie Godley, the fourth living child, was born on Saturday, April 10, 1909, on a tenant farm house owned by the Roberson family on Market Street Extension in Washington, NC. No records mark her birth except for the family bible. Birth Certificates do not exist for US citizens born before 1910. The Roberson Farm was in operation for decades before the slaves who had lived there were declared free in 1865. The slaves who remained on the farm were more than welcome to stay as tenant farmers.

Carrie lived in a small country tenant home with her mother and father and her maternal grandparents, Thomas and Emma Bryant. Carrie does not remember much of her father's parents, only that her Grandmother Mary

passed away when Carrie was six years old, and her grandfather died before she was born. Carrie grew up in a large family with two sisters and five brothers: Bessie, Augustus Cornelius, (who is my great-grandfather), David, Thomas, Ezekiel, William Edward, and Mary. Back in those days, the families who lived in rural North Carolina delivered their children in their homes by a midwife. Carrie's grandmother, Emma Bryant was the midwife for her along with the rest of her siblings and many other families in the Beaufort County area.

Being a member of the Godley family meant there was always work to be done. No excuses were given, and everyone was expected to work. It was important that the crop was planted and harvested on time. This was their only means of survival and livelihood. To abandon the crop, would

State of North Carolina, Beaufort COUNTY, Office of REGISTER OF DEEDS, Feb 19, 1898

To any Ordained Minister of any Religious Denomination, or any Justice of the Peace of said County:

I, Thos Bryan having applied to me for a LICENSE for the marriage of Ezekiel Godley of Wash, aged 23 years, color C, the son of the father now, the mother the mother, resident of Wash, aged 19 years, and Sarah Bryan of Wash, aged 19 years, color C, daughter of the father, the mother the mother, resident of Wash, the

\*And the written consent of the father to the proposed marriage having been filed with me: of the said the father And there being no legal impediment to such marriage known to me, you are hereby authorized, at any time within one year from the date hereof, to celebrate the proposed marriage at any place within the said County.

You are required, within two months after you shall have celebrated such marriage, to return this License to me, at my office, with your signature subscribed to the Certificate under this License, and with the blanks therein filled according to the facts, under penalty of forfeiting two hundred dollars to the use of any person who shall sue for the same.

J. W. Chapin Register of Deeds.

1. Name of person applying for license. 2. Name of man to be married, in full. 3. Residence. 4. Age. 5. White or colored. 6. Father of man to be married. 7. Mother of man to be married. 8. Living or dead. 9. Living or dead. 10. Residence, if known; if not, state unknown. 11. Name of woman to be married, in full. 12. Residence. 13. Age. 14. White or colored. 15. Father's name. 16. Mother's name. 17. Living or dead. 18. Living or dead. 19. Residence, if known; if not, state unknown. 20. If both parties are over 18 years of age, strike out.

Thos Bryan being duly sworn, says: That the parties applying for License are of lawful age, and, so far as he is informed and believes, there is no lawful cause or impediment forbidding said marriage.

Witness: J. W. Chapin

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA, Beaufort COUNTY, 1. George Thompson, 2. C. E. F. Church, united in matrimony Ezekiel Godley and Sarah Bryant the parties licensed above, on the 24 day of Feb, 1898, at Beaufort in said County, according to law.

WITNESSES PRESENT AT THE MARRIAGE: James H. Bryant of Beaufort Joanette Tucker

1. Name of person officiating. 2. Name of man married. 3. Name of woman married. 4. Place of marriage. 5. Place of marriage. 6. Township. 7. At least three persons present at marriage must sign as witnesses.

Ezekiel & Sarah Godley's Marriage Certificate

put the family at risk of forfeiting the sharecropping contract.

The only people whom the family would take into consideration of not working on the farm were the babies. The babies were often tied to their mothers as the women picked cotton or “handed” tobacco. The sack of crop would be on one side while the baby was on the other. Later, when the babies were old enough and could handle the capacity of farm work, they were in the field picking cotton as early as five years old.

As a child at the age of six, Aunt Carrie would work the farm with her family from sun up to sundown. This process would continue until she was in her twenties. “Growing up, we grew and picked cotton and tobacco by hand. I never liked picking that stuff. I wanted to do other things besides picking cotton and tobacco all day.” Before the age of ten, she started chewing tobacco or “dipping snuff” as a calming necessity and still uses it to this very day with no thought in mind of quitting. “It’s what keeps me going,” she said along with her Maxwell’s House coffee with Sweet and Low every morning.

Her mother Sarah died on July 8, 1925, due to chronic heart failure. Aunt Carrie’s baby sister Mary was just seven years old. On her mother’s death bed, her final words and last request simply stated: “Take care of Mary and raise her like she was your own.” Her mother was just forty-six years old. From that time forth, there was a special bond between the three sisters.

Throughout her childhood, her parents impressed upon the children to attend church. Her family attended Beebe Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in the “Backwoods” located off of Cherry Run Road. The church was founded by former slaves and freed men around 1867. The church was

then called the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. It was built and named in honor of Joseph A. Beebe, the preacher who helped to organize the church and served as its first pastor. The church served as a school for Colored children and, also, a burial ground. Today, the only thing that remains of the original building is the concrete steps and the church foundation.

Carrie saw a need to seek the Lord at the age of fourteen and was baptized shortly after in a pond near the Wharton Station area. “Many times my brother ‘Gustus’ (Augustus) would leave the house really early to go to church. His job back then was to start the fire in the wood heater and light the kerosene lamps. He left early so the church would be warm by the time the folks started to arrive. Back in those days, churches would have a lot of revivals, and the people really seemed to love to participate. It was better than doing farm work,” she said in a mischievous tone.

As young as twelve years-old, she was an usher and sang in the choir. Carrie remembers that, in the Spring as they would be on their way to church, they would always pass old Mr. Tom Ward’s house and that he used to barbeque pigs. “I remember the good smell and taste of his barbeque. That man could cook some good barbeque pig.” Further down the road, going home on the mule and cart, she would pass Mr. Henry Spruill’s store for colored people. She remembers how a big piece of Mary Jane candy would cost only a penny. “No matter if it rained or snowed we all made it to church as a family” she said.

In the early 1900’s, it was common for children in their teen years to drop out of school before entering the ninth grade. Some quit school because they chose to help their parents tend the farm land, or in most situations the girls were married off by their parents to men ten to twenty years older than they because the parents could no longer support them

financially.

Before 1968, schools in the Beaufort County District were segregated. During segregation, Beebe Chapel CME Church was also a school for Colored children until they reached high school and from there could attend the Washington Colored School, which was located on Bridge Street. Carrie attended school in the “Backwoods” until she was thirteen years old. In her case, she left school in the seventh grade to help her family on the farm to have the crops finished by a certain time of the year. During that time, it was extremely rare for African Americans to graduate from high school, let alone college. But for a few, it was accomplished. “My sister Mary was the smartest out of all of us.” Mary was the first member in the family to graduate with a high school diploma from Washington Colored School.

Tragedy would strike the family just years after the happiness of her sister’s graduation. When Carrie’s brother William was working in “log woods,” a large tree fell on him while the other workers were in the process of cutting it down. With only minutes left to spare, they had no choice but to take an ax and amputate his leg. “I had never heard a grown man scream like that in my entire life. It was as if his soul was being stripped from him.” The echo of William screaming was allegedly heard several miles away in the tobacco field where Carrie was working. She knew then that something was wrong. Her brother William was confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

Her brother Augustus married Liddie Coward at the age of 17. They had eight children. The fourth child, Lee Ardies Godley, was my grandfather. Liddie’s parents, Albert and Clara Coward were not sharecroppers. They were fortunate to have owned their own land. Liddie and Augustus purchased their own farm of 25 acres in 1942 on Cherry Run Road. It continues to be owned by his children today. Aunt Carrie says that her favorite nephew was my



*Augustus Cornelius Godley*

grandfather, Lee Ardies. She remembers him as a hard worker, but he would take time to stop by her house and make her laugh and to bring her something.

As a woman in her mid-twenties, Carrie discovered her love for dancing. “I loved to dance” she stated. “Whereever there was a party you would always find me.” By the 1930’s, dance

as “Juke Joints.” The building

was often operated as a store during the day, but at night, it was the “colored ball.” Men and women would dress up and socialize after a hard day’s work. Live music from the guitar or piano always played rhythm and blues. Records on a record player spun the tunes of Muddy Waters, Billie Holliday or Little Walter. Fried fish and black eyed peas with cornbread or pig’s feet, potato salad and cornbread were often sold. Coca-Cola and illegal whiskey was the drink of choice. For Carrie, this was so much better than staying home in the evening with a kerosene lamp.

She also loved to fish for trout, butterfish, or robins. She explained that as she would catch the fish



and clean them with a sharp razor knife and grill them right there along the bank of the Pamlico River. "Every chance I'd get, I would drag my nephew, (Mary's son), William (Pee Wee) to come down to the bank with me and keep me company," she said. Knowing that sometimes Pee Wee did not want to come with her, she would "reel him in" anyway.

For a long time, Carrie lived her life as a single woman, as she didn't enjoy the idea of being emotionally bound to someone.

She loved to socialize at the juke joints and have the freedom of dancing with whomever she wanted. She loved to travel and go as she pleased. So it came as a shock to some people when she fell in love with a younger man with an eleven year age difference, named Elijah Thomas. She would later marry him.

The year is unknown, but the two were married in Pitt County, and Carrie gave up her single life and finally settled down to seemingly enjoy the married life. The two of them would move around a few times throughout their relationship. They moved to Greenville, NC, to start a life together, and then a few years later they would move to Ayden, NC. Finally, "Little Washington, NC" would become their final destination. There, her husband Elijah would support them by working at Brentwood Lodge on Highway 17. He worked as a cook. The building still exists today as a church. "He was very handsome, but too controlling," she said with agitation. "He never wanted me to go anywhere, and he never wanted me to go out dancing. If I was to go somewhere, he always

wanted his mama to come with me." Years later, she realized that the married life was not for her. So she stated in her final quote about the situation, "I sent him back to his momma Mary and called it a day."

In her early fifties, she took advantage of the opportunity to go to Washington, D.C. by train. "I enjoyed myself there in DC," she said. She remembers that at the time she went to visit Washington, DC., John F. Kennedy had just been elected President of

the United States. Kennedy was always her favorite and beloved President. It wasn't until fifty years later she added President Barack Obama to her list. During the Kennedy Administration, it was such an exciting time. "I remember voting for him. I was nervous, scared and happy all at the same time. I remember that in some places, before coloreds could vote, they made you read and you had to pass a reading test. I don't know, but by the time it

was my turn, I just placed my mark and voted for President John Kennedy. I voted for him because I thought he would be able to help the colored folks out."

While in Washington, D.C., Carrie saved up enough money to buy a brand new Ford. She was so excited about her car. She worked as a nurse's aide and as a cleaning woman. "I did a lot of work. I didn't mind working for white folks or with white folks. As long as they treated me nice, I treated them nice. I didn't mind tending to their children either. I loved children. It didn't make no difference what color they was, as long as the money was green when I was

*By the 1930's dance  
halls for blacks were  
known as "Juke Joints."  
The building was often  
operated as a store during  
the day but at night it was  
the "colored" ball.*



through. I got along good with the white folks in D.C. I became close friends to some of them.”

Carrie didn’t know how to drive the car, so she taught herself how to drive with the help of one of her nephews. “Those highways were different in DC than they were in Little Washington.” She described them as a “circus,” one end leads back to the exact point from which you came. So, being a first time visitor or driver can be rather tough if someone is driving on their own. “I was so proud of myself. I could drive myself back and forth to work and anywhere else I wanted to go. That was fun. I had a good time.”

When she decided to move back to North Carolina, she had her car delivered home by the freight train. “I remember when the train station used to be downtown in Washington. The water use to come all the way to the back of the buildings. There was no street back there only the Pamlico River. I remember when they built Stewart Parkway. They brought in so much sand and rocks.”

Some years after Carrie had moved back to North Carolina, her husband died. Elijah Thomas died on July 16, 1978, due to Bronchopneumonia. The two never had children together, but Carrie had many nieces and nephews to occupy her attention, time, and love.

When she returned home from Washington DC, she spent most of her time with her two sisters, Bessie and Mary. All of her sisters had moved from the Roberson Farm and lived in the city limits of Washington. She lived in a small white house located on West 7th Street behind King Chicken for many years. There, she kept it neat and clean.

Carrie was often visited by all of her brothers and sisters until they died. Augustus would often bring her fresh vegetables grown on his farm. David, who loved to ride bicycles, would peddle to her house to

share a joke or two. Mary and Bessie would cook and share many meals and laughter together. Throughout all their hardships, these brothers and sisters remained close until their deaths. “I miss all of my family. I’m the only one left. I have seen my parents die and all my brothers and sisters. Even all of my friends I grew up with are now gone. I have seen a lot of things in my life time. I never dreamed, or even thought, that we would have a Black man for President. I pray for him every day. Children have so much sense now, they can talk so early. I remember when we didn’t have TV or electricity. We had a wood heater and burned kerosene lamps. We didn’t have a bathroom inside of the house, so you had to go outside and dig a hole to do your business. I thank the good Lord I don’t have to go outside anymore.”

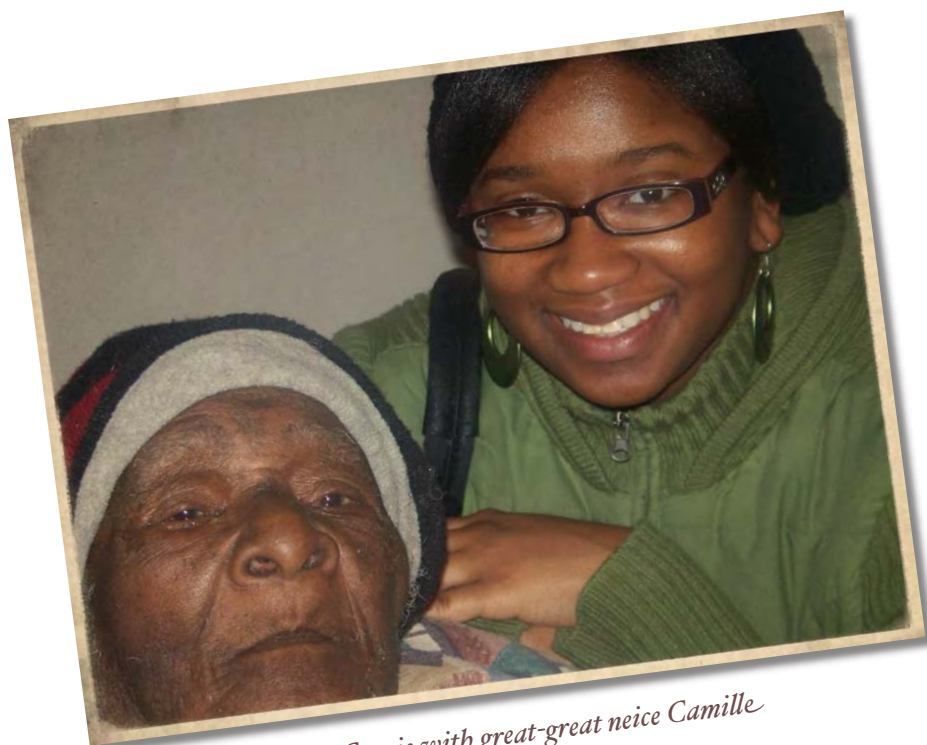
Carrie currently resides with her nephew William, who lovingly cares for her along with his companion Ms. Jacque. Carrie can no longer walk and is confined to her bed. She has a home health care person and a nurse who works with her daily. Carrie continues to have a healthy appetite: “I love me some pigtails, collard greens, white potatoes and dumplings with baked sweet potatoes and ice water and a cup of pot liquor.” Her food is carefully and finely cut, so that she is able to feed herself. “I still love to have a good time and watch church services on the TV. I love to see my nieces and nephews. Some of them come by and pray for me and some bring me things. I still see my brothers and sisters in their grand-younguns. I wish I could move around like I used to, but I’m glad I am here. It was so good seeing ya’ll, Gustus’s grandchildren and great grand children. I can still see my brother in you.”

As she took a little nap, my mother noted how much she resembled her grandfather, Augustus. Aunt Carrie’s smile, her hands, eyes and nose, even her sense

of humor, all reminded my mother of the good times that she shared with her grandfather when she was a little girl.

I never had the chance to meet Great

Granddaddy Augustus, but just as Aunt Carrie enjoys seeing her brother through us, I enjoy seeing all of my ancestors in her.



*Aunt Carrie with great-great niece Camille*

[www.beaufortccc.edu/lotp](http://www.beaufortccc.edu/lotp)

*Life on the Pamlico* is produced  
as the final project of  
HUM 120 Cultural Studies  
at Beaufort County Community College:

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.



For more information about this publication or the course,  
or to offer comments or suggestions,  
please contact Bryan A. Oesterreich  
at [bryano@beaufortccc.edu](mailto:bryano@beaufortccc.edu).

For a high-resolution, print-quality copy of this digital publication,  
please contact James E. Casey  
at [jamesc@beaufortccc.edu](mailto:jamesc@beaufortccc.edu).