

...at a railroad crossing on Terran...  
 also killed many years before Bryan's...  
 The following late July, 1992,  
 her two sons were killed when an

This is my back yard AFTER  
 We Worked on it. Sept. 18, 1988



Ann white Dress



# LIFE

*on the family*

Preserving North Carolina's Coastal Heritage Through Oral Histories



Bulldog Shuffel  
 tough we're men we're small but loud  
 sure Can please Belknap Crowd  
 weather's hot our clothes all ~~shuffel~~ Ruffel  
 we still do the Bulldog Shuffel

eat fried later and hot Corn bread  
 nine o'clock we're home in bed  
 the Coach is tuff we must Confess  
 makes us want to do our best.



2012



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LIFE ON THE PAMLICO

Cultural Studies  
HUM 120

Bryan A. Oesterreich  
EDITOR

James E. Casey  
DESIGNER

Caroline W. Long  
COPY-EDITOR

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# Editor's Note

**W**elcome to the 2012 issue of *Life on the Pamlico*.

Students in my Cultural Studies class this Spring semester have worked very hard writing the biographies in this issue. They interviewed their subjects many times in order to preserve the memories they have for generations to come.

In this issue are many stories about those who have lived in Eastern North Carolina. Some were born here – some were born abroad – and some were born in other states. But they all spent time living here.

You'll enjoy a fascinating story about an Italian immigrant who eventually decided to bring his family to Washington, NC, and provide authentic Italian food, and support for local athletics, to the community. Also, read about a woman born in the mountains of Virginia, whose father was the first farmer to breed Angus cows and buffalo to market Beefalo!

All of the stories within document hard working, persevering, family-oriented people who recognized the value of religion and community while raising their families – without the luxuries of life we now enjoy. Relive their lives on the Pamlico.

*Bryan A. Oesterreich*

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# Lillian “Lee” Grace Crombie Roberts

*“Work for Everything You Get”*

Shannon Cuthrell

**W**alking up the driveway to Ms. Lee Robert’s house in Belhaven, I think back to when I first asked Ms. Lee if I could write a biography of her life for one of my classes. She replied, “Why would you wanna write about me for? I’m nothing special.” Secretly, I thought oh, but yes you are. Ms. Lee was the first woman who really caught my eye at West Belhaven Church of Christ. I knew instantly that she was a strong, independent woman who wasn’t afraid to speak her mind. As I walk into her house and listen to



*Ms. Lee*

her little dog Sydney snore, she begins to tell me her story.

Ms. Lee was born Lillian “Lee” Grace Crombie on Easter Sunday in Brooklyn, New York, on April 1, 1923, to David and Frieda Crombie. She was the second to last child out of ten children. She grew up on McDougal Street, in a nice neighborhood. When she was younger, she and her friends would roller skate in the middle of the street for fun. “There weren’t

many cars back then. It’s a wonder we weren’t killed,” she said. During the winter when it snowed, the roads would ice over so that they

could slide down the hill on their stomachs all day. The highlight of any day for Ms. Lee was when her father came home and handed out pennies to all the kids. “A penny back then bought a load of stuff,” she said.

Sadly, she experienced tragedy at a very young age. Her father died instantly from a cerebral hemorrhage in 1929 when she was only six years old. Her mother was left to raise ten children by herself. “My mother was something,” she told me. “She was of German decent and Germans are noted for their cleanliness. She’d wash and she’d iron everything. Dish towels, wash clothes, underwear—she would iron it all. Everything!” she exclaimed. In order to help their mother, some of her older brothers stepped up to try and fill the role of her father by providing for her family.

Ms. Lee attended grade school at PS 72 Elementary School, only a few blocks from where she lived. From there, she attended Franklin K. Lane High School. She had to ride the train into town to go to school every morning. “The building was long and had pink bricks that lead to a big dome in the middle,” she said. She only attended Franklin K. Lane for three years because during the summer of 1940, she got a job at Gillette Razor Company. She told herself that if she

got a job she wasn’t going back to finish school; she didn’t. She was seventeen years old and worked in the department that made surgical blades. The business

was located directly above a restaurant that was run by one of her girlfriends’ mother. Ms. Lee could often be found there with her friends after work just spending time together. This is where she met her husband, George Washington Roberts Jr., but he was known as Junior.

Junior was originally from Belhaven, NC, but was in the Navy and stationed at the Brooklyn Naval yard. He and his buddies often went to the restaurant while on their break or after they got off duty for supper. The first time she met Junior was in that restaurant when she was eighteen years old.

They instantly hit it off, but after spending only three days with Junior, he was sent out on a ship for almost a year and a half. He and Ms. Lee wrote letters to keep up their relationship. When he came in to port and had time to spend together, it was usually with a bunch of their friends and they went skating.

In November of 1945, when Ms. Lee was twenty one years old, Junior was finished with his tour in the Navy and asked her to go with him to Belhaven, NC, to meet his family. Before she returned to New York,



*Ms. Lee's Mother Fredia, November 1957*



only five days later, she was married. When asked about the spontaneous wedding, she said, "I made no arrangements, didn't quit my job or anything." But on November 27, 1945, Junior and Ms. Lee got married by the Justice of the Peace in Washington. Junior wanted to return home to his mother's house in Belhaven for their honeymoon, but Ms. Lee insisted that they stay in Washington. The honeymooners rented a room for the night at the Louise

Hotel downtown and returned home to his mother's house the next day.

She returned to Brooklyn five days later with her marriage license for only three weeks, so she could collect her things and begin the move to Eastern North Carolina. While she was home, she didn't know how to break the surprising news to her mother. So, instead of telling her, she slid her marriage license under the thick glass of their buffet table and left it there for her family to find. Ms. Lee said, "My mother wasn't too upset about the marriage. She was just surprised." So she packed her things and caught a train headed for North Carolina.

She arrived in North Carolina before the Christmas of 1945 and lived with her husband in her mother-in-law's house for five years. Junior started working on a fishing boat and had to provide for not only Ms. Lee, but for his mother and sister, also. She says there is no way she could explain how she felt

*"There was no hot or cold water, no bathroom, no running water, no electricity, no nothing," she said, shaking her head. To make things worse, she told me that she was not aware of these living arrangements until after she and Junior got married. "If I was like I am now, I would have been on the next train home," she exclaimed, as she looked at the pictures from her past.*

about that place and that in order to understand how she felt you would have to experience it yourself. She explained, "We didn't have money, my family, but we had every convenience under the sun."

When she moved to North Carolina, there were no conveniences whatsoever. At her mother-in-law's house, there was only a well and an outhouse in the back yard. "There was no hot or cold water, no bath-

room, no running water, no electricity, no nothing," she said, shaking her head. To make things worse, she told me that she was not aware of these living arrangements until after she and Junior got married. "If I was like I am now, I would have been on the next train home," she exclaimed, as she looked at the pictures from her past.

Less than a year later, her first son William "Allen" Roberts was born on September 23, 1946. She named him William after her brother so he could be called Billy. However, her mother-in-law didn't like the idea of nicknames and would not let her call him Billy. So, he is known by his middle name, Allen.

In 1950, four months before her second child Linda was born, she moved out of her mother-in-law's house into a house on Highway 264. When asked if she was happy to move, she replied, "Nobody knows but me. I was one miserable person. I hated it for that long, for five years."

Her new house had a water pump on the back porch, an outhouse and electricity, which was a nice upgrade from her mother-in-law's home. The house was close to the road and had only four rooms; two bedrooms, a kitchen and a living room. "The sad thing is, that house is not even there anymore," she told me.

Her second child, Linda Carroll Roberts, was born on September 7, 1950. As her two children were growing up, they didn't give her much trouble. "My kids didn't do crazy things when they grew up, you know, real funny things. Of course I know they aggravated me to death at times, but I mean they didn't cause me no trouble. I didn't have any big problems with them," she said. She explained that they were constantly at each other's throats, fussing and fighting. But as they got older, they grew out of it.

In 1956, Ms. Lee moved her family again to 446 Cemetery Road in Belhaven. This is where she lives today. At the time, she only had three rooms in the entire house. The house had electricity and running water, which was another step up. Slowly but surely, Ms. Lee was climbing back to the lifestyle that she was accustomed to in Brooklyn. Letting out a deep sigh, she said, "When you get married you are supposed to move up. Well, I went the other way." She didn't let the inconveniences stop her. She continued to strive for more and was able to add on to the house in 1962. She converted the original living room to a

bedroom, added a bathroom, a hall and a whole extra room for the living room.

Right after her children started school, Ms. Lee decided to look for a full time job in Belhaven. Junior was working as a master carpenter, but she wanted to help provide for her family as well, so she went in search for a job. She found a clerk position open at the Rose's store in downtown Belhaven. She worked for that company for 29 years until the business was eventually sold.

While employed with Rose's, the store burned down twice. The first time was in 1984. She went to work with FCX (now called Southern States) in Belhaven for almost a year while the building was being rebuilt. Once the building was finished, she returned to Rose's. When the building burned again in 1985, the owners decided to sell the building and the business. Ms. Lee had not worked for this new company for a year when the building caught on fire again in 1986. She was



*Halloween Party at Rose's, 1985*

standing at the register and watched the fire roll down the wall along the electrical line. After this fire, the owners gutted the building and turned it into a hardware store. Ms. Lee was out of a job but luckily for her, she only had to draw unemployment for one week. "I never asked for no job. Every job I ever had came to me," she told me smiling.

Rusty Smith, who was the Chief of Police at that time in Belhaven, came to her and asked if she would be interested in a temporary job being the dispatcher

at the Belhaven Police Department. Their current dispatcher was having an operation and they needed someone for a short amount of time. Ms. Lee didn't know anything about how to be a dispatcher but nonetheless she took the job.

She worked with the BPD temporarily for six weeks and during those six weeks learned a lot about how to communicate over the radio.

This came in handy because after her six weeks were up at BPD, Mrs. Melda Keech approached her and asked if she would like to take a job at River Forrest Manor on the waterfront in Belhaven. "One job prepared me for another", she said. "It was all taken care of." Ms. Lee accepted the job late in 1986 and worked there for another 18 years. Her job was mainly at the desk booking rooms, using the radio to speak to the boats coming in the harbor, and keeping the books for The Manor. In the summer of 2004, Ms. Lee finally quit her job due to complications with the new owner.

Going back a bit, the year of 1970 marked a busy year for Ms. Lee and her family. She was still working with Rose's when both her children got married in the same year. Her son Allen got married in June and her daughter Linda got married in August. Also her sister-in-law got married in December. Allen married Geor-

gette Manning and they have one child named William "Billy" Roberts. Linda married Dwain Woolard and they had two children; Bryan and Justin Woolard.

With the children out of the house, things seemed quiet for her until 1975. In January things in her life took a turn for the worse. Her best friend for many years, Dorothy Cuthrell, who

worked at Southern Bank in Panteo, was held at gunpoint when a man tried to rob the bank. The man came into the bank with a note stating that he was going to rob the bank, and Dorothy did everything she was supposed to do. She fulfilled every request that the robber made. Yet, when he turned to leave the bank he shot her in the chest with a shotgun and she died. "That was a sad time," was all Ms. Lee had to say when asked about her best friend's death.

Later in the year, around June, Ms. Lee and her husband decided that after almost thirty years of marriage, it was time for them to part ways. Junior did not want to move out of the house right away, but she wanted him out right then. "You wouldn't think I was mean, but I was. It took me three months to get him to move out," she said. She got him out of the house, but then he wouldn't leave the yard. He decided to set



*Ms. Lee and Grandson Billy, 1974*

up a camper that was attached to his truck beside the house.

On some mornings, she would get up early and get on the riding lawn mower just to ride around the yard until it woke Junior up. "He would come outside and ask if I knew he was sleeping, and I would say that I did, and he would just go back inside. And the funny thing was, the yard didn't even need mowing," she said laughing. Eventually Junior moved out, and when the separation was

final, Ms. Lee moved on to a new chapter in her life.

After the separation, Ms. Lee had the chance to go overseas and explore Europe. In 1984, some of her friends decided to tour Europe. The only reason she got to go was because her sister-in-law's husband backed out at the last minute. So, she and her friends got on a plane in Atlanta, Georgia, and flew to Nova Scotia. From there, they flew down the coast to Scotland and landed in London, England.

From there they took tour buses to France, Germany and some parts of Spain. She spent three and a half weeks in Europe and got the chance to see Bucking-



*Ms. Lee, April 1977*

ham Palace, the changing of the guard, the Eiffel Tower, and the London Bridge.

In May of 1992, Ms. Lee had to live through yet another tragedy. On the 25th, her grandson Bryan Roberts was killed crossing the train tracks on Terrapin Track Road. Bryan, who was seventeen years old, had just left his home. He was headed back to school for something he had left, when a train collided into

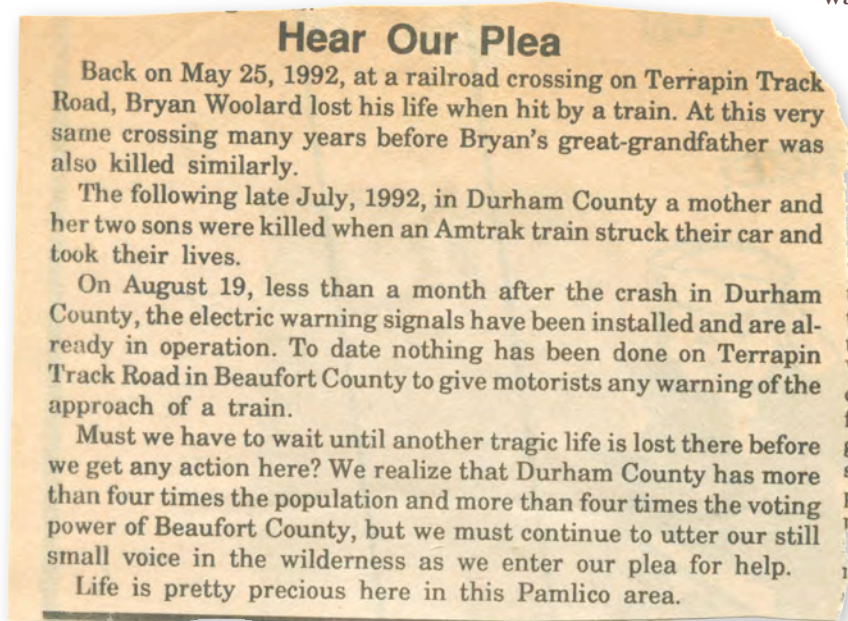
his car as he crossed the railroad

tracks, killing him instantly.

At that time, there were no railroad crossing signs or lights at the tracks; nothing to warn him of the incoming

train. The police report said that Bryan was not speeding and that his radio was not on and still today they do not know exactly what happened to caused Bryan to fail to stop for the train. Ms. Lee's oldest grandchild was taken from her life in an instant. The last

time she saw Bryan was at her sister-in-law's funeral exactly a week earlier. He had his braces taken off in that length of time, and she never got to see him without them. To make things worse,



*Newspaper Article, 1992*

Bryan's grandfather was killed on the same tracks, exactly the same way, twenty years earlier.

Bryan's mother, Linda, petitioned to have railroad crossing signs and flashing lights put up at the crossing in Terrapin Track. She ran ads in the newspaper, carried petitions for people to sign; she did everything in her power to have some type of warning sign or light put up at the track. A few years after Bryan's death, the signs and warning lights were placed at that railroad crossing.

In 1998, Ms. Lee got a call saying that her brother, Eugene Roberts, had died. He acquired a condition while in the armed services, stationed in Alaska and was never the same. When he died, all of his assets were split between the remaining siblings because he had no other family. Much to Ms. Lee's surprise, she got \$85,000. This was a major blessing for her.

When she heard the amount, she said, "I almost swallowed my teeth!" She saved most of the money but she took some and went on a shopping spree. "That was the first time I had ever spent \$1,000 in Wal-Mart," Ms. Lee said. "I may be old but I still got some sense up there," as she pointed at her head. Because of the serv-

ice of her brother, and her excellent financial skills, Ms. Lee was set for life.

Ms. Lee has attended church her entire life. When she first moved to North Carolina she attended West Belhaven Church of Christ because that was where her husband and mother-in-law went. During that time, she began to understand that going to church was more than just something you do every Sunday. She was baptized in 1955, when she was 32 years old. Now Ms. Lee's life revolves around the church. She is very involved in the women's ministries and attends Bible Study every Wednesday night.

Ms. Lee still lives at her home in Belhaven with her dog, Sydney, and her cat, Prissy. She enjoys cryp-

tograms and crossword puzzles. She also enjoys planting flowers and tending to her flower beds, reading and watching TV. She also spends as much time as she can with her family. She

has three grandchildren; Bryan, Justin and Billy and five great-grandchildren; Austin, Ryan, Brady, Holly and Allison.

When asked if she had any regrets from her past, she replied, "Well it's all over and done with now; I never wished I could go back." She also has a few words of wisdom for the younger generations. Her ad-



*Ms. Lee and Great-Grandson Brody, 2007*

vice is: “Don’t be dependent on anyone. Work for everything you get and don’t take a thing for granted.” This statement sums up how Ms. Lee has lived her life. She is an independent woman who is proud to say that she worked for everything she has gotten in her life. She has had her share of good times and bad, yet she

still continues to press on. From her charismatic outlook on life to her spunky attitude, she continues to be an inspiration to all who have the chance to know her. As I walk out of her house, I am elated to know that I have had the chance to get to know this extraordinary woman.



# Debra Anne Gibbs Blunt

*“I’m Still Going To Be Myself.”*

Asia Boyd

**D**ebra Anne Gibbs Blunt was born July 16, 1959, in Washington Hospital to a young woman named Doris Gibbs Hammand from Hyde County. Her mother called her Debra Ann. She did not meet her father until the age of thirteen. She has one older brother, one older sister and two younger siblings—a boy and a girl. She was the middle child. Ms. Debra is 52 years old and has always been a hard worker in order to maintain her family. Family has always been one of her main priorities.

As a child, Ms. Debra worked in potato fields, cucumber fields, babysitting other people’s kids, and



*Debra Blunt*

raking yards to help her single mother pay household bills. “I believe I got my work ethic from my mom,” she said. Ms. Debra’s mother always kept a job. She was a cook and worked at the Knotty Pine Inn. “My mother was a hard worker; I guess that’s where I got my work ethic.” She kept a job as long as she was physically able to work.

Ms. Debra was not into hanging out in the streets; she would rather help her single mother pay bills, clean the house, and help take care of the children. Ms. Debra was a very smart child. “My mother had to basically force me to go outside, and when she did, we played

games like 'bottle top' or played at the playground at school." She explained how bottle tops were like marbles. There were five people on each side, and they would flick bottle tops. She said that was a huge game that everyone played. They would bet money and have tournaments. She said each "block" had their own "bottle top" game going on. She also said they would play baseball with doll baby heads. That brought a smile on her face, thinking of the "older times."

She excelled in school, causing the school to ask her mother to skip her a grade or two. Her mother said, "No." She wanted her to finish school with her age group. Although she was hurt by her mother not allowing her to skip a grade, Ms. Debra obeyed her mother and continued to do well in school. She commented that her teachers would give her work that was on a higher grade level. "I loved school. They couldn't keep me from that place. I was a straight A student and also was a debutant."

As I watched this amazing women talk about her school years, I could see a glow in her face. She also told me that her school was cold and heated with coal. Lunch was 6

cents and you could get a lot of cookies with 4 cents. Ms. Debra talks about a trip her classmates took to Cary, N.C., when she was in the fifth grade. She said, "They were very prejudiced down there. We didn't

even get to go inside the museum." She explains this was near the time when schools had just integrated. The people at the museum told them that the white kids could go inside but the black kids couldn't. She recalls how the school officials were upset and in return would not let any of the kids go inside. They loaded the kids back on the bus and left.

I asked her about past boyfriends. She told me, "I didn't have time for boys, I was too interested in school, and I was a bookworm." However, she told me how she met her husband Isaac.

She said Isaac was a persistent man who would not give up. "I used to dislike him so much," she said. She recalls him showing up at her door with flowers, and giving her mother money. "I would always turn him down." She was not interested in dating at that time.

Unfortunately for Ms. Debra, Isaac got a job at her school driving buses just so he could be around her. Ms. Debra's



*Debra at 23*



*Country Life*



mother was in love with him and believed he was a nice guy. She encouraged her to go out with him. It took some time, but at the end of 1975 in August, he finally “conquered” her. He was seven years older than her and he was an ex-marine that went AWOL. They began dating. He would take her out to the movies and most importantly help her with homework because that was her main priority.

Tragedy struck in 1976, when Ms. Debra’s mother died at 36 years young, leaving five kids motherless. Social Services took her brothers and sisters. They took her older brother Thomas to a boy’s camp out of state, her younger sisters Painsey and Alice to an out of state all-girls school, and her younger brother Renwick to a boy’s school in the mountains, but they never found Ms. Debra. This was an extremely difficult time for her, especially because she was pregnant and graduating soon.

In 1977, Debra Ann graduated from Washington High School. She did not attend her graduation because she was pregnant, although the school counselor would have allowed her to go. She also had a scholarship to go to Elizabeth City State University, which she did not accept. How-

*The people at the museum told them that the white kids could go inside, but the black kids couldn’t. She recalls how the school officials were upset and in return would not let any of the kids go inside. They loaded the kids back on the bus and left.*

ever, in those days if you didn’t use your scholarship for college, you would get cash in return. “I believe I got about \$300-500 dollars in scholarship money,” she said.

On July 4, 1977, there was a terrible storm and the lights went out. That was the day that

Ms. Debra’s first child was born. “He was born in the dark,” she said. She named him Quinton.

Two years after Quinton’s birth, and after her second child was born, she got married to her husband

Isaac and moved into a “raggedy house” located right in the front of King Chicken. She said she did not have a big wedding because she didn’t want to feed a lot of people that did not like her. After marrying Isaac, they had a big celebration with their kids. They never had a honeymoon because they had kids and couldn’t afford it. They married at the Justice of the Peace and did not wear anything special. However, Isaac was persistent about wearing three inch tall, and three inch fat black shoes to the wedding ceremony. “I had to choke to keep from laughing,” Ms. Debra said while shaking her

head laughing. Not only did he wear those shoes, but he also forgot to bring the wedding bands so she was



*Debra with Husband Isaac*

given a cigar ring for her wedding band. It was too big for her finger with her being a small woman.

After getting married, the newlywed couple moved into a house. The house was not a trophy, but it was a well-kept house. "I was proud of my raggedy house," she said smiling. Her house had a back porch that sat over a ditch, a chimney, and an outhouse. "It was airy, had holes all over the place, but I kept it clean. The outhouse was located far from the rest of the house, and I never used it, not one day!" She loved her house, but she was also scared of it. She would use the restroom at King Chicken or a local gas station. She found two chairs for her house, and one was a lounge chair.

Tragedy struck again, when Ms. Debra lost her 9 year old son Quinton in a house fire. This was a difficult time for her family. After losing her first born, Ms. Debra had to stay strong for her family. She could not allow such a horrible event to make her less of a mother to her other children.

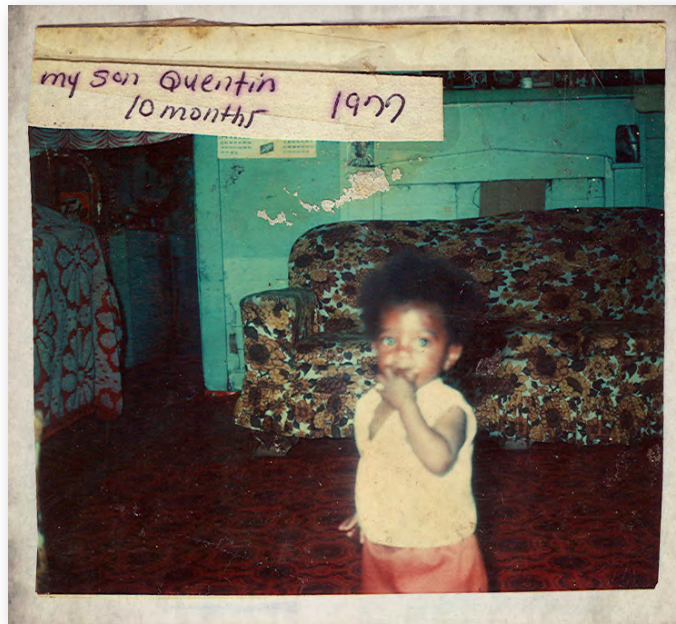
Family was important to Ms. Debra. She loved her children so much and raised

them the best way she knew how. She and her husband had always been hard workers and they tried to raise their kids with the same work ethic.

After 32 years of being married and raising her family, Ms. Debra's marriage came to a halt. They grew apart and choose to live separately. Although, Ms. Debra loved her husband, she knew it was the right thing to do, but it still hurt to see him leave.

"Even though I went through a lot of ups and downs with Isaac, I learned that it don't matter how much the times are changing I'm still going to be myself."

Ms. Debra currently lives alone and says she is enjoying the single life "like you young folks say." She also continued, on saying that she has always tried hard to solve anything that has challenged her. She smiles and says times are really changing, and she has not caught up with the new changes. However, she believes that there is no need to because what is new will soon be old, whatever is old will soon be gone, especially if you allow it. She seriously



*Quentin Eugene*



*Jamillah and Quenwick*

joked that she still owns some antiques (VCR, 8-track player, and old tape players) that she will get rid of someday.

She said to me, "Asia, I am a 52 year old woman, and I have learned a lot of things, just like you will learn a lot, but the hardest thing to do sometimes is letting go." She then continued telling me that she is learning to let go, with the number one thing being

her kids. She stated that her kids are adults and that it is time for her to take a step back and let the little birdies fly from the nest.

I asked her if she had anything she would like to tell others and she responded by saying: "There is an old saying that life can be like a rubber ball. Sometimes it bounces, sometimes it rolls, and sooner or later it stops. Life gets bounced around just like a ball."



# Mary Hopkins Cuthrell

*“Be Honest and True to Yourself”*

Ashley Smith

**M**s. Mary Hopkins is my husband’s great aunt. I have never met her before, until now. So, I was very interested in getting to know her and about her life. Here is her story.

On January 2, 1932, Hattie Fulford Hopkins and Jasper William Hopkins gave birth to Mary Delores Hopkins. She was their 5th born child. She was born at home in Belhaven, a small town here in Eastern North Carolina. She was born in an area called Pamlico Beach. Mary had four brothers, two sisters, and three other siblings.



Ms. Mary was born at home. Her youngest sibling, Thelma was the only one born in a hospital. Ms. Mary was eleven at the time. She recalls having to cook and do everything for the whole crowd while her mom was in the hospital. Her mom had Thelma at this time and was sterilized. “She had 10 children.

It was time,” she said. Her mom was in the hospital for over a week. Ms. Mary had to cook breakfast. She also had to get her baby brother ready, so her dad could go to the hospital with their mother.

When Ms. Mary was growing up, she had a lot to do around the house. She said, "You pretty much worked. You didn't sit around the house and do nothing." She helped her momma make quilts. She washed clothes, scrubbed floors, washed dishes, cleaned up around the house and cooked. Their food was either fried or boiled.

Their family raised their own chickens, a cow for milk and cream, and had hogs. Her family would have hog killings. They would take the sausage meat and partially cook it. They used the grease for that and would pour that over the sausage in a jar to seal it up for winter. They would freeze vegetables such as beans, corn, okra and peas for wintertime to preserve them. They also canned a lot of things such as apples, pears, fig and peaches.

One of her chores before going to school was to pump wash water to wash clothes in. She would pump it in a bucket and tote it the house. The clothes were washed on a washboard. There was no washing powder or bleach at that time. Her mother would make their soap. They would take old leftover grease and put it in a pot. They would build a fire around the pot to get it hot. They took Lye and stirred it in and cooked it until it jelled up. It would be left in the pot until it got cold. Then they could cut it out when it hardened up. It was called Lye soap and it was what

they used to wash clothes in. To iron their clothes, they would use a flat iron. It would be heated up on a wood stove, and there was no ironing board back then.

There was no electricity hooked up until she was seventeen. They also didn't have a bathroom inside the house. They used the outhouse. The outhouse was a little house built outside close to the main house. The inside had a long seat with 2 holes in the

seat. This was over a hole in the ground. There was also no toilet paper or napkins. They used things such as the Sears Roebuck catalog or a rag.

As a child growing up, they didn't have a lot of toys. When they had free time they would walk to a friend's house and

play out in the yard. Another thing they would do growing up is to go to a friend's house and cook candy. To cook the candy, they would take sugar, water and vinegar and cook it until it formed a soft ball. They would then take lard and work the soft ball with their hands. At this point, it was kind of like taffy. After that, they would take a small piece and pull it with their hands and twist it. It was put on wax paper until it hardened up. Then it could be eaten.

Ms. Mary's mother's house was the gathering place. They always had somebody there on weekends. It would be some of her brothers' friends, or friends of other siblings. They would make 3 cakes on the weekends since they always had company over. Her whole



family would get together and eat lunch on Sundays. One of Ms. Mary's favorite meals growing up was baked flounder with bacon on top.

The family didn't have a car growing up. "Everywhere you went, you walked. You didn't have cars back then," she explained. They would walk to church on Sunday mornings. Then they would go back home for lunch, and then walk back to church that afternoon.

As a child, she went to a Pentecostal Holiness Church. Religion was "very much so" a part of their family. They went three times a week. They went Saturday, two times on Sunday and Wednesday nights. The church was a basic church. She said, "Of course they would get happy and shout at times." They had a Christmas play every year at church that she would participate in. Another tradition they had at church every year was Homecoming. During Homecoming, they would have a big dinner on the church grounds. The neighborhood would cook, come together, and share the food.

Ms. Mary went to a one room school house in Pamlico Beach until she was in the 2nd grade. She walked five miles to this school every day and walked 5 miles back every day. This school closed down and she then started attending Belhaven Elementary. She was able to take a bus back and forth to this school. Belhaven Elementary had first to eighth grade. She then attended the high school called John A. Wilkinson

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High School and graduated in 1951. She had classes such as grammar, arithmetic, science and history. They had the basic classes, nothing like there is today. She didn't participate in any sports but she was in a club called Tri-High Y club. This was an organization where they raised money for different things. Ms. Mary never went to college. They didn't have the money to go to school. She said, "Unless your parents had money, you

didn't get to school."

Ms. Mary's first job was in tobacco. She was about 13 or 14 when she started. She helped to prime and sucker the tobacco. She made \$0.25 an hour. She did this on the weekends and during the summer. It rained about every day they worked. "You would be wet from head to toe," she said. They still worked, no matter the rain. She also helped to pull weeds out of her daddy's bean fields from time to time.

Growing up, her family didn't go on many vacations. She recalls her biggest vacation as a child was a time they went and stayed with their aunt. They stayed with her for a week in Washington, where she lived. They rode on the back of a fish truck to her house, and their dad dropped them off. They fished, picked blueberries, and spent time with their cousins. One day that week they helped by working in tobacco. She said, "That was about the biggest vacation I had growing up."

In March, 1954, she met James Allen Cuthrell. They met on the streets of Belhaven at a walk-in movie theatre. Her husband walked in the kitchen where we were smiling and said, "She rocked my world." They both recall it was a "Rock Hudson movie." Love stories and Westerns are all they made back then.

Ms. Mary and James married eight months later on November 6, 1954. Her husband said, "She was a half an hour late. I was getting ready to run," as he laughed. They got married at Pamlico Beach Missionary Baptist Church. Ms. Mary had one attendant. They had a simple wedding, nothing big. They didn't go on a honeymoon. Ms. Mary said, "We have been on one for about 58 years," as she smiles.

When they first got married, they lived down the road from their present home. They lived in a big, two story house with an elderly lady, Ms. Lizzie. They rented the first floor, while Ms. Lizzie lived on the top floor.

On January 1, 1956, Ms. Mary gave birth to their son, James Brian Cuthrell. He is their only child.

When their son was thirteen months old, Mr. James wanted to move where some of his friends were. They moved to Free Union for a year. After a year there, they moved back into the house with Ms. Lizzie where they started out. They moved to their home they live in now in March 1960. Carolina Model Homes put up the house, and then Ms. Mary and Mr. James finished the house themselves.

Ms. Mary and her husband got their first washing machine when their son was born. It was called a wringer washing machine. The wringer washing machine wasn't like the washing machines we have today. The clothes would be put in what was called an agitator to wash them. After they were washed, the clothes would be put through rollers to wring them out. You would then hang them up on a clothes line to dry. They also didn't get a TV until around the time their son was born. The TV had just the basic channels. Before that, all they had was the radio. The radio did have programs that came on such as soap operas, *The Grand Ole Opry*, music and other programs.



As their son was growing up, Ms. Mary didn't do much work outside the house. Her work was being a housewife and mother. She did do some work in tobacco when they first got married. She helped set out tobacco. She also graded and tied the tobacco. But other than that she did "basically what most mothers did." She worked in their garden,

cleaned the house, made her son shirts and sewed for him. She made her son a winter coat and pants one year. When her son was nine, he started to work in tobacco himself. She would make sure she was home every day around lunch time so she could make him lunch. Ms. Mary's husband did carpentry work and did that for 45 years.

Her husband had a car when they got married. He would need it for work, and Ms. Mary didn't have a license at that time. She said that her family didn't have a car, so she never learned to drive when she was younger. In 1966, they got a Volkswagen for the family because she needed to take Brian different places, and her husband had the other car for work. In 1968, Ms. Mary got her license.

When Brian was sixteen, Ms. Mary was bitten by a copperhead snake. She was walking out of the house barefooted at night, and it bit her. She said, "It

only got one fang in, and it swelled up really big." The doctor had an anti-venom shot but didn't want to use it if he didn't have to. All she had to do was pack it on ice for forty-eight hours and it was fine.

When she wasn't busy being a mother and keeping the house clean, she was busy with her mother. Ms. Mary's husband worked all during the week.

On weekends, they would both go to her mother's house and help her do things. They would keep her yard mowed. They would work in the big garden she had. They had always helped her, but they really started helping her around her seventieth birthday.

Ms. Mary would go to her momma's every Wednesday to help her. She would take her mom shopping on Fridays. In the summertime, she would go over there around four times a week. She would go over there to help do things that needed to be done.

On November 23, 1985, Ms. Mary's only son Brian, got married. He married Glenda Brooks. In 1992, Brian and Glenda had a daughter named Shannon. In 1995, they had a son named Allen. Ms. Mary and her husband spend time with their son and his family by going on family vacations. They go to places like Myrtle Beach and Tennessee. Their family would also get together and have a birthday dinner every year





for Ms. Mary's mother. Sadly, in 1994, Ms. Mary's father died, and in 1999 her mother died. Her mother died of congestive heart failure.

Ms. Mary's family has a family get together every year still. They do a pig picking for a family reunion. They have it around the first Sunday in July. The family also gets together for Christmas every year. Ms. Mary's husband worked in carpentry for forty-five years and retired in 2002. Today, they live in the same house they had built in 1960,

in Pinetown. They spend their time being with their son, daughter-in-law, and grandkids. Ms. Mary also spends her time in the garden and canning foods.

I enjoyed getting to know Ms. Mary, about her family and how she grew up here in Eastern North Carolina. I appreciate her letting me do this biography on her. Before I left her house on my last interview, I asked her if she had any advice for the younger generation. She said, "Be honest and true to yourself. And trust in the lord."



# Joyce Ann Paige Rogers

*“You Have to Go Out and Work for What You Want”*

Elisha Williams

**S**he’s a mother, grandmother, aunt, cousin, and friend to many. Joyce Ann is a well respected, church going woman who will help anyone that’s in need. If you need someone to talk to, she would be right there for you. When I had to find someone to interview, I knew that Joyce Ann would be a great person. She’s my great, great aunt, whom I’ve known all my life. I’ve always wanted to know more about her, so I took advantage of this opportunity.

Joyce Ann Paige Rodgers was born June 28, 1952, to the late Fred Paige and Jennie Simmons Paige in the Beaufort County Hospital. Her father, Fred, worked at the mill plant, and her mother Jennie did domestic work. “She worked for white people, mostly cleaning



and cooking for them, but now they call it domestic work,” she says. Joyce Ann was the youngest of four brothers and five sisters.

She grew up in a small, wooden, two bedroom home on Sixth Street in Washington,

North Carolina, with her brothers and sisters. Her mother and father were in one room, while the girls were in the second room, and the boys would make a pallet on the floor in the living room or wherever there was room. A pallet is where you would take a couple of blankets and make a homemade bed on the floor.

She says, “Yessa! I remember those days we didn’t have a lot but we made the best out of what we had.” There was an outhouse for the bathroom that was located on the back porch. “We had a bucket in

the house where we used the bathroom. After we finished, we had to go outside and empty it, so that's why we called it the slop bucket." The house was heated by a wood stove, where the boys had to take turns getting wood.

My great, great grandmother, Jennie Paige, did most of the cooking for the family. Meals consisted of cabbage, pigtails, baked macaroni and cheese, candied yams, and homemade chicken and pastry. Big meals were made every day.

"I was the youngest of ten kids, so I didn't have to do a lot of chores," she said. I talked to Joyce Ann's oldest sister, Mary Alice, who said, "Joyce Ann was a spoiled child. She didn't do a lot work around the house. We older kids did most of that. Sometimes we'd have her sweep or clean up the room." Joyce Ann did learn how to sew and cook from her mother.

Looking at some pictures, I asked what was the purpose of having a plastic cap on their heads? "That was the only way we could keep our Jerry curl fresh. Girl, that was the style back then!" She also mentioned how they used straight irons that had to be heated up on the stove to straighten their hair. "We

had to hold the little bottle tops on our ears so that Ma wouldn't burn us," she explains.

"I remember when I was younger I didn't hang with kids my age. I went everywhere with my closest sister Elma even though she never wanted me to," she says laughing. "We used to go to the 'Suga Shack' and dance and have a good time." As a child, Joyce Ann does not recall ever being sick. She does remember having a doll baby that didn't have real hair, but she could draw its face. "I

loved that doll. I had fun right by myself with that doll baby."

Since Elma was the second to the youngest girl, Joyce Ann hung around her most of their childhood. When they started to get older that's when they started going out dancing, to house parties, shopping, and just doing what most teenagers would do back then.

We continued to look at some photos that she got out during an interview. As she was smiling and looking at the pictures, she talked about how much she loved her childhood and went on to tell me stories of my own mother when she was growing up.



Every Sunday, Joyce Ann's mother made sure that she and her brothers and sisters attended church as well as Sunday school. She is still a member of the same church she attended when she was younger, Beebe Memorial CME. Beebe Memorial, the first African American Methodist Episcopal church ever erected in North Carolina, now stands on the corner of Respass and Fifth Streets in Washington. From its beginning as a small wooden building, then called the Christian Temple C.M.E. Church, and better known as the "Hill Church," it has grown continually and now stands as a structure of beautiful architecture. "I strongly believe in the Lord," she says. Joyce Ann does a lot of volunteer work at the church and whenever there is an event going on, she's there.

At age six, Joyce Ann went to P.S. Jones School in 1958 up until she started at Washington High School in 1966. "When I was

*Her mother and father were in one room, while the girls were in the second room, and the boys would make a pallet on the floor in the living room or wherever there was room.*

Joyce Ann disliked English and science, but math was one of her favorite subjects. She liked all of her teachers in both schools that she attended. "I loved when I was in school and we prayed before we did the Pledge of Allegiance. I think that's what's wrong with kids

going to school it was segregated. P. S. Jones and Washington High School was for black kids and the white kids went to a different school." Denise Smith was and still is Joyce Ann's best friend from her school days.

these days, they don't have a moment for prayers," she says shaking her head while we were talking about the topic.

Joyce Ann was in the Glee Club. This was a musical group historically made up of male voices but also of female or mixed voices, which traditionally specializes in the singing of short songs by trios or quartets. Also a member of The Drill team, an unarmed division, Joyce Ann would march with intricate precision, along with various



hand movements. Modified step team routines were also used, but as a participant she had to keep in step, as she was evaluated by military judges.

In April 1970, Joyce Ann married David Earl Rodgers by a Justice of the Peace. Her cousin Carrie Satterthwaite was one of the witnesses. They didn't have a reception or a honeymoon because they needed to save money for the child they were expecting. On June 20, 1970, Joyce Ann and David Rodgers had their first child and named her Jackie.

Joyce Ann's marriage to David Rodgers lasted for two years when they decided to get a divorce. "This is one thing I will let the younger generation know—don't rush into getting married. It's

not all what you think it is. There are ups and downs to marriages, but think long and hard before jumping into it. You live and you learn." In September 1977, she had her second daughter, Missy Farrow Keyes.

After graduating High School in May 1970, Joyce Ann's first job was at Samson Shirt Factory for five years where she worked in production. Her second job was at Hamilton Beach, where she was a machine operator. Shortly after, she worked at National Spinning Mills, where her job was to spin yarn. This was her last job. "Now a days things are not just handed to you. You have to go out and work for what you want."

Joyce Ann always held down a job and sometimes even two or more to support her family. She said that some jobs she had she didn't like the work, but the people are what made it fun to go. While we sat down talking together, I told her that's exactly how I feel about my job.

On September 20, 1986, Joyce Ann welcomed her first grandchild Chasitty. She smiled while looking



at Chasitty's picture. "That's my baby! You know how it is when you have your first grandchild and you can spoil them." In the summer of 1988, Joyce Ann's father passed from being sick for many years.

Sometime after Chasitty's birth, Joyce Ann

was blessed with another granddaughter, Safaniya, by her oldest daughter Jackie. She has two grandsons Jayamiah and Jamichale by her youngest daughter Missy. If Joyce Ann wasn't working, she was spending time with her mother, Jennie Paige, who passed away in May 2002 at the age of 90.

Joyce Ann spends her spare time going to church, visiting her children and grandchildren in Atlanta, Georgia, doing her crossword puzzles, attending family reunions, and watching the stories. "I love watching my stories now," she said laughing. While visiting in Georgia, she had the chance to see Martin Luther King Jr.'s grave, and she also went to the Coca-

Cola bottling plant. "I drunk so much Coke Cola that day, I had me a good ol' time. We went shopping at the Underground. It was nice."

I enjoyed spending time and learning more

about Joyce Ann. I learned more and more about her each time we got the chance to sit down and talk. Not only is she a well respected person, she is a role model to her children, her grandchildren, and also to me.



# Ann Tyson Coward Woolard

*“When You Show Love, You Gona Receive Love”*

David Tyson

As I walk up the freshly painted gray concrete steps of Ms. Ann’s front porch, I run through all of the members of my new family who have done the same. Ms. Ann, or Granny as I sometimes call her (she prefers her “young-ins” to call her that), as well as her daughters, son, and so many more accepted me as part of her family on September 24, 2011 when I married her “baby” granddaughter, Drew; however, there was much more that came before that. Let’s start at the beginning.

Ann Tyson was born on April 22, 1936, in Calico, North Carolina, to farmers Joe Bryant Tyson and Besie Adams Tyson, who were also born in the same area.



Ms Ann was named after her paternal grandmother, Martha Ann Tyson, also from the Blackjack area. There were five children in the Tyson family, with Ms. Ann being the middle child of four boys: Junior, Jesse, Bernice and Jimmy (from oldest to youngest).

She was born on a farm, like most people were in post-depression, pre-war times. This helped her learn many life lessons like

“how to survive, how not to waste food, and how to take care.” The Tyson’s farm was self supporting. She and her brothers helped her parents raise chickens and hogs as well as farm tobacco and various vegetables. Ms. Ann remembers milking cows and gathering eggs

for breakfast for the family before going to school every morning, riding the mule and cart with her brothers, and picking corn after school. The family also shared peas and meat with their neighbors. “Times was hard back then. It wasn’t like today; you youngins couldn’t do it. You got it good!” Though her early life wasn’t the easiest, she is thankful for that time in her life. “Everyone ought to have a little bit of responsibility. It makes you not want things you can’t afford,” she says.

Pineapple cake and chocolate cake were “mama’s specialty” around the Tyson home. A typical dinner for the family was chicken and pastry, collards, and chocolate cake—a meal that we all still eat today, courtesy of Ms. Ann. Their family all ate together every Sunday. Most of the stories Ms. Ann tells about “the old days” revolve around the farm.

She remembers one afternoon when her parents were in the field chopping corn while she and her brothers played on the front porch. All of a sudden the sky turned “black as night in the daytime,” and her mother ran to the house, shut all the windows and doors, and got the five small children inside before a tornado “came right through the field.” With fear in her eyes, she remembers worrying about her father, who didn’t make it to the house. “Thank the good Lord he had sense enough to lie in a ditch,” she says. Though no lives were lost in the tornado, the Tyson

family lost their “bacca barn” that her father had just built, and Ms. Ann developed a horrible fear of thunderstorms that persists to this day.

As a young girl, she always looked forward to going to stay with her grandma and grandpa. “I thought I was really goin’ somewhere when I got to go over there,” she recalls laughing. One of her favorite memories was about coffee. Every time her Mama and

*Every time her Mama and Daddy would drink coffee, she would beg for some. They always denied her request, telling her that coffee would make her ugly and they didn’t want that for their little girl. Ms. Ann had a secret though, when she went to her grandparent’s house, they would always give her all the coffee she wanted.*

Daddy would drink coffee, she would beg for some. They always denied her request, telling her that coffee would make her ugly and they didn’t want that for their little girl. Ms. Ann had a secret though, when she went to her grandparent’s house, they would always give her all the coffee she wanted. “They spoiled their little girl,” she says.

She attended Chicod for grammar school, which she explained was like a mixture of middle school and elementary schools today. All of the grades were in the same building, all the way up through high school. She rode the bus to school and had to walk a half mile every morning. She brought “dinner” every day and remembers the other children in her class getting jealous because she would bring country ham biscuits with fresh ham from her father’s pigs. Her favorite subject was arithmetic. She said this prepared her for her jobs working with the public because she could count up the change she owed back to people in her head. When she and her classmates were





punished in school, on top of a spanking, they had to go sit in the corner and pretend to sit in a chair. “They called it an ‘air cushion.’” She only remembered having to do this once because that’s all it took. “If you got whooped at school, you got home and got a whoopin’ too!”

Shaking her head, Ms. Ann told me how she quit when she got to high school. When I asked her why, she said, “lack of sense! That’s why I wanted my kids to go. Back then you was either rich or you was poor. Your parents couldn’t do no better. They survived and that’s all they done, I left school to help them survive!” When asked what she learned in school that she wanted to pass on to the next generation, Ms. Ann said: “learn how to listen and do what you’re told, then life won’t be so bad for you.”

Unfortunately, when Ms. Ann was about twelve, her grandmother got sick. “In those days, they didn’t have homes for old people to go to; they had to move in with us,” she said. Because there were two more people now living in the home, she gladly gave up her bed for her grandparents and made a bed on the floor,

where she slept until her grandfather passed away. Her grandma wasn’t the only one going downhill, though—her grandpa developed cataracts. She remembers him having thick glasses. She also remembers having to shave his face for him because he couldn’t see well enough to do it himself.

Ms. Ann took on the responsibility of taking care of her grandparents, so the rest of the family could tend to the farm. She routinely woke up in the middle of the night with her grandmother to give her medicine. After her grandma died, her grandpa was devastated. “We had a hallway upstairs that went between the rooms. He walked that hallway and cried every night after grandma died. It wasn’t long until he died too. He loved her so much—they needed to be together,” she said.

Through it all, Ms. Ann still describes her childhood as wonderful: “You didn’t have to lock your houses back then, you won’t afraid someone would break in and your youngins could go out and play.” At Christmas, when Santa came, all of the children got a basket full of candy as their only present. “That’s all

you got and you were thankful for it. There won't no I want this and I want that. You was thankful for what you had." She also fondly remembers coming home from school and playing softball with her brothers. They also taught her how to fight since she was the only girl, and they taught her how to ride a bike. All she wanted to be when she grew up was a mother. And from 17 years old, she has been nothing but.

At 17 years old, Ms. Ann married a man she had known her whole life. "You just know people in a small town," she answered when asked how she met her husband, William Lloyd Coward. They were married in a friend's house with just the preacher and the family who owned the home attending. They didn't go on a honeymoon: "Back then ya didn't have the money to go nowhere."

William was 13 years her senior and was a widower with 2 daughters, Judy and Muriel, who had ended up in foster care after their mother's death. "A man couldn't raise two babies on his own. I couldn't leave those babies there; I brought them home not two weeks after we got married," she said. Since then, Ms. Ann has treated Judy and Muriel as her own without question:

"We don't talk about it. They're my girls." She remembers going to get Judy and Muriel just before Christmas. "We put the tree up and everything before we got them. They were happy to come home and I was happy to bring them home so they could be happy."

Ms. Ann gave birth to a son, Pete in 1954 and a daughter, Jokay in 1956. She maintains that the most joyous and fulfilling times of her life have been watching her children growing up. "My children have really been my whole life."



The young Coward family got their first television not long after William and Ms. Ann were married, and they had brought home Judy and Muriel. This was a big deal to them, and it ended up being a bigger deal when it caught on fire. "I was layin' in bed with my girls when it caught fire. I went over there and snatched that cord out the wall! It won't funny at the time but it sure is now!" Ms. Ann exclaimed with a laugh.

Not long after, in 1960, the year before Jokay went to school, Ms. Ann got a job working nights at the Chuck Wagon, now known as the Dairy Palace, a job she got because William

worked moving houses at one time. They worked on a “percentage basis,” she explained to me. All of the workers started off working as a team, but she soon made the most out of the team, so David Lamm, the owner, started paying her on her own commission. “The least I got was \$250 a week! It was just a trailer, not a brick building like it is now.”

She would spend her nights cooking and her days taking care of her children, her home, and her husband, sleeping when she had a chance. She worked there for a year, when the owner of King Chicken, Mr. Stencil Lilley offered her a job. “He kept comin’

over buyin’ coffee from me wantin’ me to work for him.” Finally, she said she would take the job, but only if she could work during the day so she could spend some time with her “youngins.” Mr. Lilley agreed and “I lost money, but I had better benefits.” Ms. Ann had worked for Mr. Lilley, who she still speaks of very fondly, at King Chicken for 36 years when she retired.

William passed in 1985, and the family took Ms. Ann to the mountains. She remembers the cottage they rented and going to the state park to see all of the animals. They even hiked up the mountains and went to the mile-high bridge. “The only thing I didn’t enjoy was walkin’ cross that bridge,” she recalls.

Ms. Ann got remarried on January 5, 1990 to Frog Woolard. Technically, he never asked her formally. “I’ll never forget those words,” Ms. Ann said with a laugh. “He said, I reckon we might as well get married.” And that’s just what they did: “The preacher came out and married us here in the livin’ room.” Just the family was invited, and they took a

weekend trip afterward to Raleigh and Wilson for their honeymoon because they both had to be back at work on Monday.

Throughout her life, her faith has been at the center. Ms. Ann is a Free Will Baptist and believes that “if



you read the King James Version of the Bible, and follow it, then you’re alright. If you don’t, then you ain’t alright. That’s how I feel about it.” She never dreamed of changing faiths because “there’s no other way to feel. There ain’t but one God.” Today, her beliefs give her more strength when she is in pain. She says it helps to know that “God is there all the time, anytime.” She said that she doesn’t know how people who do not know the Lord get through painful situations. She also said that she wants to tell her children, “and grandyoungins too” to love the Lord more. “Everybody better before it’s too late!”

Ms. Ann believes the most important thing you can be in your life is a Christian and that honesty is

the best policy. “Some people in the world make it hard on the ones tryin’ to be honest and be a Christian. If you hold on to your honesty and your faith, things that are dark can open up and be bright!” she said with a smile. She is most grateful for her family: “I just love them all. They all have so much love in their heart. All of them have.”

The pride and joy of Ms. Ann’s life today is her “youngins and grand youngins”: Judy, and her husband Joe, Muriel and her husband Kirby, Pete, Jokay and her husband Dennis and their children Will and Drew.

This past September both Will and Drew were

married two weeks apart, Will to Amy and Drew to me. Will and Amy have a 5 year old daughter, Emma, who Ms. Ann describes as the “apple of my eye.” She has adopted all of us as her own even if we are not related by blood, and she could not love us any more. It has been a pleasure to spend the time it took to write this article with Ms. Ann and grow our relationship stronger. She is a beautiful, strong woman who has lived a hard life, but she has managed to persevere throughout it all. She is someone we should all strive to be more like.



# Mae Lou Keyes

*"I Have Learned From My Mistakes, And They Have Made Me Stronger."*

Jermaine Goddard

I've always had a great appreciation for my grandmother and how she has handled taking care of her family, while also providing for the community. When I was informed that we were to write an article about someone who has lived in the area for years, my grandmother immediately came to mind. I called her to ask if I could interview her for the class project. She was a little surprised at first, but she eagerly agreed to help me.

Mae Lou Pope was born on August 15, 1947 to Edna Louis and Cherry Pope. She was the second born of eight siblings, including four



*Mae Lou and William Keyes*

brothers: Vance, Cherry Leon, Johnny Ray, and Curtis and three sisters: Anne, Queen Ester, and Evellene. As a child, my grandmother lived in a wooden house in Washington with only one bedroom, which had three beds in it. Her father left before she attended school, leaving her mother to take care of the family.

My grandma remembered having to do chores around the house daily as a child. She didn't have any choice in whether or not she wanted to do them, so she "came to love" doing them to help her mother.

These chores included washing clothes and drying them on the line outside, washing dishes, and ironing out clothes using heat from the stove. She would use scrub-boards to wash the clothes. There were three tubs, one with washing powder, another with Clorox for white clothes, and the last tub was filled with water for rinsing the clothes.

Grandma began cooking so early, that she remembers having to “pull up a chair just to reach the stove.” Her family used a wood stove to cook food. The wood stove also provided heat for the front room, while the stove heated the back. They cooked and ate cabbage, pigtails, and fatback-flavored meat almost every other day. She and her siblings also ate plenty of beans, rice, and grits. She used to love eating biscuits with what she used to call ‘Grand Mammy Molasses.’ They also ate chicken, but it was a luxury that they only got once a month. Everyone ate at one table, which was average in size.

She knew to “get my work done first” and finish her chores before she began playing. As a child, my grandma would play hop scotch, marbles, jump rope, and run around the house with her siblings and some of the other neighborhood kids. She would also race against the neighborhood kids and would “beat ’em every time.” When she was very young, she would also pull up roots from the ground and pretend they were doll babies because they couldn’t afford to get the real ones at the time.

The first school she remembers attending was Mother of Mercy Catholic School, here in Washington. Because it was Catholic, she was required to have

a 30 minute Mass (church service) in school every day. She remained there until 6th grade.

The only major accident grandma remembered having was one she attained from her grandmother’s store. Her grandmother owned a store that had its items displayed in a glass showcase. She recalls running around the store playing games like hop scotch and marbles so much that, without paying attention to

*When she was very young she would also pull up roots from the ground and pretend they were doll babies, because they couldn’t afford to get the real ones at the time.*

what was going on around her, she bumped into one of the glass showcases and cut her wrist badly. The cut was so deep that she was able to show me signs of the cut even now.

Grandma didn’t have any traditional vacations when she was younger, so for her visiting her Aunt Mae in Ayden was a vacation. Her Aunt Mae would cook a giant slab of meat, but because there were so many people in the family, by the time the plate got around to her, she only got a small portion. Every morning they were served breakfast that consisted of biscuits, fatback meat with beans, molasses, and occasionally grits.

In 1959, at the age of 12, she dreamt of becoming a service woman who worked in the Army. She thought it was something nice to do and really liked the uniform. She also believed at the time that the army paid good money, but later found out it didn’t. But by age 15, she decided that she wanted to become a nurse when she got older. She liked the nurse uniform and had a desire to help others.

She attended P.S. Jones beginning in 1960, which at the time held mostly all of the remaining grade levels. She didn’t like most of her teachers. She felt that the teachers didn’t spend enough time with the slower

students and only concentrated on the smarter students who already understood the subjects. She was also spanked regularly by the teachers, who were allowed to beat children with paddles back then. She felt that some of the teachers were mean for the sake of it. She remembers one particular teacher would intentionally bar the door of the cafeteria, so students couldn't make it to their class rooms on time before the late bell rang after lunch. Grandma was very stubborn back then and didn't cry like she was supposed to during some of her beatings, which resulted in receiving harsher spankings than the rest of the students.

She and her sister Anne would also get picked on by some of the other classmates. Peer pressure and bullying were prevalent even back then. Some of the local bullies would follow my grandma home to assault her. Her last name being Pope made her and her sister the constant target of jokes as well. But she was willing to endure it until her mother came in the afternoon to pick her up. She also discovered that they were advancing students to the next grade level, regardless of whether they learned anything or not, which disappointed her. She decided to drop out at age 16 to pursue work instead.



*My Granddad, William "Bill" Keyes*

In 1964, she moved to David's Lane in Washington to live with her older brother, Vance. Grandma worked on a farm doing seasonal work with cucumbers in spring, tobacco in the summer, and no work in the winter. She used to pick the cucumbers out of the ground "by the bushel." She would help plant tobacco in the soil, chop off any dead leaves, snap the top of the tobacco off, and then harvest the tobacco from the field. She worked on the tobacco farm for years.

The men in the neighborhood would cut down wood that they called "lotta wood" from wood stumps.

It was a reddish color and looked different from other trees. This specific wood was used for both heating and cooking with the wood stove and would last them two or three weeks by itself. If the men were out all day and the wood ran out, grandma would go out and chop a few trees herself. She could "chop 'em down as good as the men could."

Grandma met William Earl Keyes when she was seventeen. He was called 'Bill' by his family and friends. He was 12 years older than her, so when he first met her mother she called him an "old you-know-what," but grandma didn't think he was that old.

They used to go out around town with other girls accompanying them, so she wasn't sure

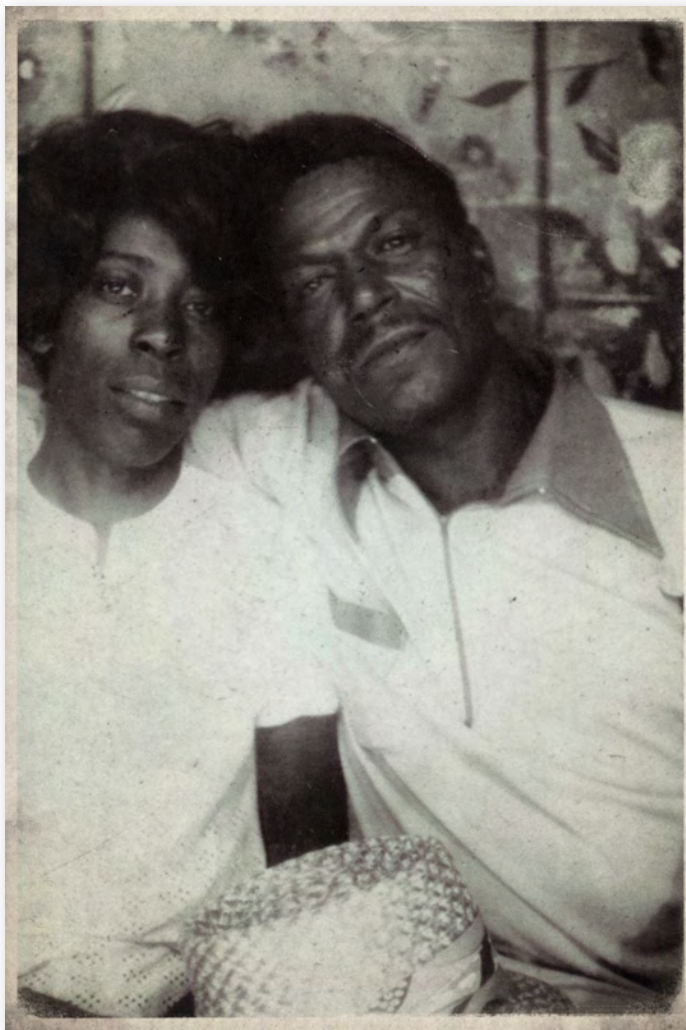
they were dating at the time. Granddaddy Bill just “assumed she ought to know.”

Grandma first attended Mary Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in 1967 and became baptized a year later. Being born again was one of Grandma’s greatest joys in life, and to this day she continues to live her life so that others can see the peace of Christ through her. Granddaddy Bill was already a member of the church at the time and was part of a long family line of pastors. His uncle was the pastor at the time. The church was usually run by someone in either the Keyes or Moore family.

Later that year, my mother, Mary Ellen Keyes, was born on October 26, 1967. She was delivered by a midwife in a trailer in Chocowinity. The following year, my aunt, Juanita Keyes, was born in Beaufort County Hospital on October 5, 1968.

Granddaddy Bill was a very dedicated man who helped those around him and didn’t like to sit and relax if he knew there was work to be done. He worked on the same tobacco field that grandma did and eventually became a supervisor for a field owned by a man known as ‘Lord’ Taylor. Granddaddy Bill was also an avid smoker of cigarettes but attempted to quit in his later years. He was a strongly religious man who val-

ued his faith as much as his family. On January 7, 1969, they got married at the court house by the Justice of the Peace.



*Grandma and Granddaddy*

My grandmother’s mother was sick ever since she remembered, but it began to get really bad as Grandma became an adult. Her mother suffered from a severe mental illness. She stayed at her own home but had to go to the hospital when she didn’t take her pain medication regularly. Grandma was the last one to know that her mother was drinking. She used to buy a month’s worth of liquor and store it, as well as use “snuff tobacco.”

In 1970, at age 23, she started working at Beaufort County Hospital. Her boss was Clyde Hicks, and she got along with him. He

believed that “as long as you got your work done, you were good,”

but her co-workers were still very intimidated by him, mostly because they were often lazy and didn’t like doing their work. Grandma remembers working so many hours at the hospital one year that the neighborhood thought she was cheating on granddaddy Bill because she was gone so much.

Grandma and Granddad worked together a lot around the house. They would cut the grass, clean up, and Granddaddy Bill would even help cook. In the



winter, when there was no work on the field, Granddad would stay home and babysit the children while Grandma worked at the hospital.

In 1974, Granddad would take the kids to the field to pick cucumbers during June. He would even allow the oldest, Kent, to

drive the tractor when he was only 7 years old. In July, the kids were kept in the barn while Granddad worked in the field because they weren't allowed on the tobacco field. When the children got a little older, they were allowed to pick up the fallen tobacco leaves behind the adults and place them in a bag.

All the children attended classes in Chocowinity until around 8th grade, where they finished the rest of their schooling in Washington, except my uncle Matthew, who dropped school in the 12th grade.

My mother, Mary Keyes, gave birth to me on Oc-

tober 19, 1987. I was the first of my Grandmother's grandchildren born. I don't remember much of my childhood, but my Grandma says that I would often stay with them while my parents were working. My granddaddy Bill would also take me everywhere with him.

My Granddad would often do odd jobs for people who needed things fixed or built. He would replace flooring in houses, build porches, repair roofs, and other helpful things. My mother would often tag along to help him. Granddad and mom even built the shed I currently stay in for me several years ago, when I was still in high school.

In 1992, my grandmother had to stop working at National Spinning because she was placed on disability. Later that year, on August 15th, her mother, Edna Louis, passed away. This was the first great tragedy to affect her, and it gave her great sad-



*Granddad with my Mom Mary and Aunt Juanita*



*Grandma and Granddad with my cousin Aisha*

ness.

Even though my grandmother wasn't supposed to babysit because of her disability, she would still look after me and my cousins whenever we visited. I often have flashbacks of me combing my granddaddy's hair for a dollar or playing with toys with my Aunt Juanita's children. Grandma also enjoyed fishing often back then, with my mother around the park in Washington.

Grandma was an active member of the church and was part of the choir in Mary Chapel's Missionary Baptist Church for a while. She has recently scaled back and became mother of the church.

On April 19th, 2010, the second greatest tragedy occurred for my Grandmother. After battling terrible pain and sickness for several months, my Grandfather Bill died of pancreatic cancer. This was very heartbreaking for everyone in the family but especially for

Grandma who knew him the best out of anyone. She still feels sadness even now.

Grandma took her very first vacation in July 2010 to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. It was much needed for her to get her mind off problems in her life. She went with most of her family and stayed an entire week. She spent most of the time fishing, sightseeing, shopping at the mall, and watching her grandchildren swim in the pool.

My Grandmother has had a long and interesting life, full of trials and tribulations. When asked if she had any regrets in life, she replied, "I have no regret. Even through the trials, I have learned from my mistakes and they have made me stronger." Her advice for her 34+ grand and great-grandchildren is to "Love the Lord with all your heart, and trust that God has a plan for you. And do unto others as you would have them do unto you!"



*Grandma on vacation at Myrtle Beach, SC*

# Lyda Adams

*Others First Before Herself*

Sherry Neal

She is a funny, kind, and thoughtful woman who feels like my own grandmother. Her name is Lyda Adams, and she gave me the honor of listening to her recollection of stories from the past. Lyda, with her humble nature, was very hesitant in talking about her life. When first asked, Lyda said, “Well honey, there is really not much to tell.” Yet, once she began talking about romance, hardships and good times, I realized that her life was more interesting than she thought.

Lyda Adams was born on December 1, 1938, at her home in Washington, NC, to her parents, Charley and Mamie Alligood. Lyda was the first of eight children. Growing up, she quickly assumed the role and



*Lyda Alligood*

responsibility of mother to her seven younger siblings while her parents Charley and Mamie went to work. Charley made his living by farming tobacco, beans and corn. When Charley wasn't working on the farms, he would sell fish and fruit on the side. Lyda says, “Daddy would do anything he could to make a dollar.” When she was only eight years old, her parents worked out in the fields just across the road from their house. While they worked, Lyda was left at home to tend to her seven brothers and sisters. She said her job was to straighten up the house and watch her brothers and sisters until “mamma and daddy” got home.

She laughed and said, "There weren't much to straighten up because there was hardly anything in our little house to clean." Lyda and her family lived in a small three bedroom wooden house on South Asbury Church Rd. The living room consisted of a day bed as a couch, a white wooden rocking chair, a kerosene heater, and a small rug in the floor. The kitchen had a three burner oil stove and a wooden kitchen table and chairs.

She said that they did the typical chores, but they didn't have the luxuries that we have today. She said that her mother would make their own brooms out of broomstraw grass. They got their water from an outside water pump for drinking, bathing, cooking and for washing clothes. Lyda considered themselves lucky compared to other families in the area who had to get their water from a well.

They washed their clothes outside in a bucket with a scrubbing board. She said that washing clothes was one chore that she didn't have to worry about because her mother took care of that. The only thing she had to make sure was washed were the cloth diapers for the babies. "Mamma would make a diaper out of anything," she said. Lyda's mother would use old T-shirts, old sheets, or anything she could find that would work to make a diaper. She remembers hanging the diapers on a chair in front of the kerosene heater for them to dry. Having seven younger brothers and sisters, Lyda changed her fair

share of diapers. "Disposable diapers and paper towels were the best inventions ever, I just wished I had them growing up!" she said.

Babysitting and housekeeping was Lyda's everyday life while her parents were at work until she was old enough to work in the fields herself. She recalls from about age eleven to thirteen she worked in the tobacco fields near her house. She worked in the tobacco fields in the summer to earn money for her school clothes. "I can still remember those twelve hour days handing and packing the tobacco and putting it up in the barns. Those were some hot summers in the tobacco fields," she said.

When Lyda wasn't working or watching her brothers and sisters, she enjoyed going to the Park View Drive-in Theatre. "For a quarter you could get a drink and a bag of popcorn," she said. She remembers one incident when she begged her father too many times to take her to the drive in just as she always did.

She told me that this night turned out a little different because her father decided to teach her a lesson for aggravating him so much.

Charley agreed to take her to the drive in, but he never came back to get her. As the drive in was closing for the night, Lyda realized that she was the

only one left other than the owner. The owner reassured her that he would take her home after he closed up everything. "I was so scared," she said. As the owner was on his way to take her home, they passed



*Alligood Family*

her father on the road. They pulled over and Lyda got in her father's truck. After that night, she never asked her father to take her to the drive in again. Lyda smiled and said, "I never went back to that drive in until I started dating."

She giggled as she told me the story of how her life began with her one and only love, Carlyle Adams. "I was about thirteen when my friend begged me to go out on a date with a boy named Carlyle. See, my friend was the one who liked Carlyle, and she only wanted me to go on a date with him so she could go out with another boy at the same time to make Carlyle jealous. That plan sure did backfire because I went on to marry Carlyle."

Over the next two years, Lyda and Carlyle went on many more dates. She said they would go to The Wye Grill and Tankers Grill in Washington. They would go there to grab dinner and just hang out with their friends. She said most teenagers used to "go parking" behind Tankers Grill and "you know, do what teenagers do."

While they were dating, Lyda remembers when Carlyle taught her how to drive a car for the first time: "Carlyle sure did have a lot of patience with me." He

would take Lyda down an old dirt road in Washington and set up tobacco sticks to teach her how to parallel park.

Carlyle, at the age of 22, and Lyda at the age of 16, decided that they were going to get married. So on April 16, 1955, Carlyle and Lyda took a drive down to South Carolina and tied the knot.

When they got to South Carolina, it was early hours in the morning, so they slept in the car in front of a police station. The next morning, they went to the court house to get married. Their witnesses were a stranger they met on the street and the Sheriff of the

county they were married in. Lyda said, "I sure am glad that the man didn't ask to see our Birth Certificates because I lied about my age so I could get married."

They paid only \$60 for both of their wedding rings. She said that \$60 doesn't sound like much now, but back then that was a lot of money to them. She said she was glad they went away to get married because she knew that would be the only honeymoon she would ever get.

After they were married, they moved in with Carlyle's par-



*Lyda & Carlyle Adams's Wedding Picture*

ents in Pantego, NC. Since Lyda went to Washington High School, Carlyle bought Lyda her first car, a 1952 blue and white Chevrolet. He bought her the car so she could drive back and forth to school. She completed the tenth grade before leaving school. Lyda said that after being married, going to school just didn't feel the same. She said she felt more like an adult than the rest of the kids, and she felt like she didn't belong. Still to this day, Lyda regrets never finishing high school.

After quitting school, Lyda began working to help support herself and Carlyle. Her first job was at a bakery in Belhaven. She said her job was to make sandwiches and desserts. She can't remember the name of that bakery, but she does remember they had the best doughnuts and

honey buns. Lyda said another memory that stuck out about that bakery was that the owner wanted white people to sit on one side and black people to sit on the other. "You know, things sure were a lot different back in those days," she said.

While Lyda worked at the bakery, Carlyle worked for his family business, Adams Logging. She said that she worked at the bakery in Belhaven for just a little while before getting pregnant with her first child, Debbie, in June of 1956. She said that she didn't particularly want to have many children after having to watch her brothers and sisters growing up, but she wouldn't trade the ones she has for anything in the world. "We didn't have birth control back then like

these girls have today," she said. Shortly after having Debbie, Lyda and Carlyle moved out on their own.

Over the next ten years, Lyda and Carlyle moved around from home to home in Washington, and during that time they had four more children. Kathy—July 20th 1957, Carl—September 21st 1958, Jimmy—August 25th 1961, and Robin—March 30th 1963.

When Robin turned about three years old, Lyda and Carlyle bought a house from Carlyle's Aunt Alice,

just outside of Belhaven in 1966. She still calls this place home today. She recalls many good and some bad memories after moving into their new home.

"Carlyle's Aunt Alice ran a small grocery store just a few feet behind our house," Lyda says. The store only sold grocery items, but Alice

later started selling alcohol, which really made the business boom. Lyda said, "We sure did have fun at that store on the weekends, we would drink and dance to some music and just have a ball. It was nice to hang out with our friends, and when we were tired, we just walked a few feet and we would be home."

One bad memory that Lyda remembers vividly was an incident that happened with Jimmy when he was just a toddler. They had a kerosene heater in the living room that had a small leak in the tank, so they put a tin can under it to catch the kerosene. One day, Jimmy came into the living room and grabbed the tin can. Lyda said before anyone could stop him he turned the can up and started drinking. "That child collapsed instantly like a limp wash rag. We had to

*"We sure did have fun at that store on the weekends, we would drink and dance to some music and just have a ball. It was nice to hang out with our friends, and when we were tired, we just walked a few feet and we would be home."*

rush him to Pungo District Hospital to have his stomach pumped. It scared me to death,” she said.

Lyda and Carlyle lived at their new house for about two years before they got indoor plumbing in 1968. “It sure was nice to have an indoor bathroom instead of that old outhouse,” she remembered. The children seemed to like the new bathroom as well. Every morning before school, the kids, one by one, would walk through the kitchen and tell Lyda what they wanted for breakfast. Then, they proceed to the bathroom and wait for their turn to take a bath.

“When Aunt Alice would stay with us, she said that it was like living in a restaurant. The kids would just put their order in, and when they were done in the bathroom, their breakfast was waiting for them,” Lyda says.

After having her first son, Carl, in 1958, Lyda started a job at the Belhaven Crab House. They had to be into work at 7am, and it varied what time they got off. It all depended on how many crabs were caught that day. She only made 75 cents an hour, and it was mostly seasonal work, but with five kids it was a way to bring in the extra money. Lyda worked there for about twenty years while raising her family. Carlyle continued working in the “log woods” and driving log trucks for the family business. Carlyle also ran bull-

dozers and draglines, clearing land for farmers and land developers. Lyda said Carlyle could run just about any piece of equipment that he had to.

Lyda remembers when Carl was about six or seven years old, he backed Carlyle’s truck in the ditch in front of their house. “I tore his little legs up with my flyswatter from that truck to his bedroom,” she says laughing. She didn’t want Carlyle to find out, so she called a tow truck to come pull the truck out of the ditch before Carlyle got home. Lyda said that tow truck cost her about one week’s pay, which was only about \$38.00.

When the kids became old enough, they began cooking and cleaning and helping out around the house. When they became teenagers, they got jobs of their own to make money. Carl and Jimmy

worked at a hog house just down the road from the house, and the girls worked at restaurants and a sewing factory in Belhaven. When Carl turned nineteen years old, he joined the Air Force and was stationed in Delaware, where he still lives today. Debbie married and moved to Fayetteville, NC. Robin and Jimmy stayed in the Belhaven area and Kathy lives in Pantego.

Carlyle continued working, and with his spare time, he built and sold trailers and worked on lawn



*Debbie, Kathy, Carl, Jimmy, Robin, Carlyle, Lyda*

mowers for extra money. Carlyle did this until he was diagnosed with cancer in the fall of 2000. Carlyle battled cancer for two years before his passing at the age of 70 on December 3, 2002. After being married for 47 years to the love of her life, Lyda never remarried.

Today, Lyda has six grandchildren, one of whom is my husband. Lyda has since retired from the Crab House and enjoys spending time with her five children,

six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. She is a special person who, for most of her life, has taken care of others first before herself. It is a privilege to know Lyda, and I enjoy every second that I get to spend with her listening to stories and talking about the good ole' days. She is a very special person to all of her family and everyone that knows her.





# Queen Esther Haywood

*“The Lord Brought Us From A Mighty Long Way.”*

Trinia Cobb

**E**very evening, around the same time, you can find Queen Esther Haywood sitting in her favorite brown recliner, wearing a kitchen apron, and watching *Wheel of Fortune*. Putting on an apron was something she watched her mother do time after time before heading off to a hard day of work, and so, as a daily ritual she puts it on with her regular clothes as she performs her daily tasks.

Born on May 26, 1923, in a community that has been coined Maple Grove, Queen Esther, now age 88, can recall her childhood years as if she was still in them. Only being able to attend school up to fourth grade, her attention to details is astounding. “Anne Peed and Lilly Moore was the name of my teachers as



I attended Maple Grove school,” she said, “Across the hill from the school lived more kin folks, down in the neck, we called it.” Queen Esther was quickly introduced to plantation life. “Black men performed all the manual labor like setting out and picking tobacco, picking cotton, and digging ditches,” she says. “The ladies

had to tend to the white women’s children and do the house work.” Her mother, Amy Ellison, had the sole responsibility of taking care of the house and children on the plantation.

Tragedy struck early in Queen Esther’s life when her biological father was killed by a stray bullet as he waited at the train station. “I was told that the bullet was intended for another black man, who was believed

to have assaulted a white woman,” she says in a sorrowful voice as she drops her head. “Mama got remarried to Willie Harvey, the only daddy I knew,” she continues. “Lynching was a common thing back then and the black man would be beaten if he would even stare at a white woman, but now it common to see them together. If only these young men of today could understand the things their ancestors went through,” she says with a look of concern on her face.

At the age of six, along with her six brothers and one sister, Queen Esther lived in a three bedroom wood house which sat on cinder blocks. She could name every location where she had lived throughout her life. Bud was the oldest brother, and Willie Bell was the youngest sister.

With no running water, she would go down to the creek and gather water in a container. “This was fresh water with no pesticide in it,” she says. “I wasn’t scared to drink it, because that’s all we had, it was some of the coldest water. The only thing I was scared of was the snakes that lay on the banks,” she says in a high pitched voice. She recalled having to eat sausage wraps and sweet bread a lot in her youth. “I don’t cook as much now, but I still make homemade biscuits.”

She loved Mary Jane candy, which she could get three pieces for one cent and a Coca-Cola for five cents. “We had no TV or radio, so we had to entertain ourselves by reading the Bible and talking about our day. Those days you work hard and played little. I was

taught to put my trust in God and that he can work it out,” she adds. When Queen Esther grew old enough to go work, she did just that.

Around the age of 10, she arose around 3:30 a.m. each morning and started her chores. Tending to the hogs, shucking corn, and cleaning the hen coop were among the back breaking jobs. “We worked from sun up to sun down, earning 50 cents a day. Mama kept telling me that we had to crawl before we could walk

and a little money was better than no money. You thanked the Lord for what you had until you could do better.”

Queen Esther’s mother made all of their clothes, and Queen Esther made all of her children’s clothes, too. “Mama was a good seamstress. She made everything that we wore, and she

even made men suits.” Her mother would buy three yards of fabric for one dollar which was considered the good stuff. “I remember making my daughters matching dresses, and I hung them by the heater. I woke up the next morning, and the clothes had scorched from the heater. I went to pick them up and they fell apart as if someone put them in the shredder.” We both laugh. Shoes cost about two to three dollars back then, so she would buy her kids’ shoes much bigger than their feet, so the shoes would last longer. She taught them to value what they had.

At the age of thirteen, she joined the Maple Grove Missionary Baptist Church. She can recall every pastor’s name. “Pastor Murphy, who served for 32



years was the first pastor,” she says, and then she proceeds down the list. “We had to walk five miles to church, so mama would pack our lunch because the trip would last all day. We would prepare the food the night before and start our trip early cause Mama hated to miss Sunday school, and I am that way today,” she said with smile on her face.

Still today, Queen Esther likes her food fresh. She prepares her collards, fried chicken, and biscuits before she heads off to church.

While attending church, she was asked if she wanted to join the usher’s board and she said yes: “I loved being an usher.” The only thing that concerned her about ushering is she had to wear white stockings. “I didn’t care too much for white stocking, but after a while I got used to them,” she said.

She really enjoyed her job and serving the people. She has been recognized for her dedication to ushering and now holds the title as the oldest usher that is still reporting to her post at Maple Grove Missionary Baptist church. “Being an usher is one of the

*“We had to walk five miles to church, so mama would pack our lunch because the trip would last all day. We would prepare the food the night before and start our trip early cause Mama hated to miss Sunday school.”*



most important jobs in the church, can’t be mean and hateful, and you have to treat people like you want to be treated,” Queen Esther pauses, “Mama always told us that, and it stuck with me.”

Around the age of eighteen, a man by the name of Moses Haywood, who lived in the same neighborhood, would come to “court” Queen Esther. She said she knew of him but didn’t care much for him at the time. He wore her down by wooing her with his charming ways, so she finally gave in. “Back then when you dated, the boy

had to come to the house and mama and daddy would watch you. It won’t no staying past time. At 8:30, you got your hat passed to you and 9:00 you were packing sand,” she adds with laughter. They dated for only three months before he asked her to marry him.

Unfortunately, Queen Esther’s mother died in 1940 before she got married.

In 1941, at the age of nineteen, she married Moses. It was a short wedding ceremony. They had six children, all birthed by a midwives. Back then, most

families didn't have the money to call the doctor unless a child was sick. The doctor had to travel by horse and buggy, so it took a long time for him to arrive.

Midwives stayed pretty busy. For about six months they lived on Blount's plantation, and then they moved down the "ditch" as she calls it. Moses was a sharecropper who worked on farms cutting tobacco, building



tobacco barns, and planting tobacco beds. Not having much money, they grew all their own food in a garden that was tended to by Queen Esther and the children. They had to dig a hole in the ground to put the meats in that were also wrapped in coats. They packed the hole with ice the size of cinder blocks. "We didn't keep a lot of meats because it wouldn't last long. The ice man only came around maybe once a week." She made due with what she had by canning. She kept a fresh supply of apples, peaches, jellies, and molasses. It wasn't until after Moses's passing that Queen Esther received her first refrigerator and electricity.

In 1966, Moses died. She took it hard. It took her about six months to get stable enough to handle life and business. With her first Social Security check, which was \$8.50 for each child, she began to purchase things that she never had in her life such as a living

room suite. She also paid for her house to be wired with electricity. You can imagine the joy the kids felt. She still did not own a television set, but her kids

would go down to a cousin's house to watch television.

The older kids had moved away to get jobs, but she remembered that while she was working her oldest son came down from Virginia

and put a refrigerator in the house and then returned home before she had gotten home from work.

In 1990, at the age of 70, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. In 2008, she was diagnosed with colon cancer. She even suffered a broken hip, yet she told me, "I thanks the Lord my Savior for being a God that is still in the healing business." Now approaching the age of 89, Queen Esther spends her days relaxing. As a young lady, she kept to herself and trusted God's word. Now she tells stories that come to life right before your eyes. As we sat, we had to pause for a second because her great grandbaby wanted us to quiet down so he could recite grace over his food. She states, "The Lord brought us from a mighty long way." If children of these days could have lived back then they would appreciate today's life and resources.

# Leslie Jordan

*“Always Be A Person Of Your Word.”*

Virginia Russell

**M**y grandfather, Leslie Jordan, was born in Beaufort County Hospital on February 5th, 1945. Leslie grew up with his mother, Edith Earle Cox Jordan, father, Leslie William Jordan, sisters Mary Alice Jordan, Sybil Marie Jordan, and Pauline Joyce Jordan. Unfortunately, he never got the opportunity to meet his only brother. Before Leslie was born, his only brother passed away at the age of five due to his appendix rupturing. So, growing up with three sisters, and the only other male being his father, I imagine it put a lot more work on my grandfather.

Leslie is not the type to complain or fuss about work, and to this day he is still a hard working man. My grandmother is always telling me that she can't wait until the day he can slow down a bit. He grew up



*Jordan Family*

working with his father, who was a sharecropper, and his mother, who earned the reputation as being the fastest lopper around. Leslie explained memories of being so young that he had to

stand on the top row while pruning the last tips of tobacco. When he rarely did complain, his father would toughen him up, and they would finish the job.

Leslie and his family all lived in a small house in Pinetown. Throughout his childhood, they lived in about five different houses because his dad was a tenant farmer, so they lived in tenant houses, but they finally ended up returning to the first small house. He, his sisters, and his mom and dad all shared a room. The children were separated from the parents with a sheet in the middle of the room.

Leslie and his sisters were raised in the Pine-town Church. "I was forty-two years old before I accepted Christ and was baptized." He was baptized in Woodard's Pond Church of Christ, where he now attends regularly. Church is a huge part of his life.

Leslie remembered specifically always looking forward to Christmas events held at church as they always had a basket of apples and oranges and candies waiting at the door when they left. Also, his mom would make tea cakes for the family. They didn't get iPods, new cell phones, and X-Boxes for Christmas and birthdays like we do today. He told me that Christmas was the only time they ever got an apple and orange. Leslie paused, and a smile came to his face. He told me about he and his sister running down the ditch to his grandmothers' house and sneaking apples from her trees. "But she always knew it," he said. Christmas wasn't the only thing that has drastically changed since his younger days.

There were no toilets, so the family used an "outback house." As far as toilet paper went, they used the Sears and Roebuck catalogs. I giggled when he told me this, and I asked what a Roebuck catalog was. He laughed and said, "The older people will know when they read this."



*Leslie, Edith, Mary Alice, Sybil, Leslie Jr., Pauline*

It wasn't until 1979 when his mother even got a bathroom, and Leslie never even took a shower like people generally do today until he moved away from home. In the winter, water was heated on the stove, and they washed up in a wash pan. In the summer, a wash tub was set outside, and they all shared this tub to bathe. I told him that if it were that way today, I'd be fighting to be the first one to bathe every time!

Another thing that wasn't available to their family until late 1950's, was television. Their first television was black and white. I asked what some of his

favorite shows were, and he said *Boston Blackie*, a detective show.

The youngins' show was *Pinky Lee*, and I had no idea what that was so when I asked, he mainly just remembered it being a show about a man who always said "Hee, hee, hee, my name is Pinky Lee!" I saw my grandfathers sense of humor starting to come out, and it made me so thankful to be spending that time with him.

The first toy Leslie recalled playing with as a child was a BB gun. I asked what he shot with his BB gun. "Mama made me eat everythin' I shot," he told me. He mostly shot birds with it. Other toys they made were bow & arrows, sling shots, corn shooters, and the most dangerous was a gun made of bike spokes. He also recalled his dad giving him a toy bull-

dozer once, but mostly they didn't get toys like that. They mostly made their own.

I asked if they ate any unusual food back then. "We ate raccoon baked by my mom," he said. I asked him what about rabies, but he said, "Back then you didn't hear much of that like you do today." When it came to buying groceries, they were bought on credit. The family got their groceries from a store owned by Harold Bowen. Leslie remembered his dad never liking when his mom would spend more than \$14-\$17 a week on groceries. They would pay off their groceries at the end of each month, but every Christmas, they were back in debt.

For fun, Leslie and his friend Johnny Chamber went swimming in the swimming hole down the road from his house. He didn't know how to swim, so one time he was feeling in front of him with a stick. Before he knew it, Johnny had jumped on his back and he almost drowned! It was a story I never would have heard if I had not the opportunity to interview him for this article.

Another time, he swiped grapes with Johnny Chamber from someone's grape vine to try and make wine. He put the wine in his pants and went to play

*There were no toilets, so the family used an "outback house." As far as toilet paper went, they used the Sears and Roebuck catalogs. I giggled when he told me this, and I asked what a Roebuck catalog was. He laughed and said, "The older people will know when they read this."*



most vivid memories were of him and his friends throwing rocks at the water tower in the winter to try and knock down the icicles, and having to write over and over "I will not go down the slide standing up."

Other times when he got into trouble were when he got "whoopens" at school. He smiled when telling me, "If ya got a whoopen at school, ya got another whoopen at home." The teachers would go to the students' houses and tell the parents about what happened and that they had been whooped. Most of the time though, they would try and keep it quiet, but it was hard. I asked Leslie what they would get whooped with, and he said mostly it was with a belt or switch. One

time, he made the mistake of picking a small thin switch when his father told him to go out and get one. He never made that mistake again!

pool at the game hall. The bottle busted in his pants while playing pool and there was wine all over the front of his pants. He was so embarrassed.

I started off asking Leslie what elementary school was like. "Well, I don't remember much other than gettin' in trouble for bein' mean a lot," he told me. His

In the seventh grade, his teacher failed him. He had to go to summer school that year to be able to get into the next grade. When he graduated high school, he remembered the look on that teacher's face when she saw him walk across the stage and receive his diploma. My grandmother was listening to our conversation and asked who his favorite teacher in school was. Leslie said it was Ms. Cooper. "Isn't that the one who failed you?" said my grandmother.

"Yeah, but she was pretty." We all laughed together. I really started enjoying the interview at this point. I realized that I had never sat down and really talked with my grandpa like I was.

After graduation, my grandfather's dad promised a down payment on a car. It was priced at \$1,500 and it was a 1960 Galaxy Starliner. He went on to work at the National Spinning Co., with no benefits and no paid holidays. For everyone's birthday, they received a silver dollar. After he was through at the company, he moved on to work in construction. In this job, he traveled "as far south as Florida, as far north as Boston, and as far west as Colorado."

But, every summer he planned on being laid off, and he would always return home to help his father in the fields. Through all the years he worked in construction, there was only

one accident he could recall. There was a manhole that Leslie stepped in. Scorching hot steam was blowing into the hole from pipes, and when my grandfather stepped into it he was injured severely. He was out of work for about six weeks.

Dating, or as Leslie calls it, "courting" or "neckin," was very different in his day. They would go to drive-in movies, or park behind Hardee's, and everyone would hang out there. He dated a few girls, but then came along his wife Pauline. They were married in 1967, on April 21st. They stayed married for twenty-four years and eight months, but Pauline did not want to have children. She raised her little brother, and as Leslie said, she felt like she had already had her family.

So she had no desire to have children with him.

After their divorce, Leslie continued his work in construction, and while traveling, he needed a housekeeper. It was then that he met the woman he would grow old with, Mary. She was his housekeeper for a while, and from then on they dated. They had their first date at the Eagles Club. It was a dance club, where they played mainly 60's music and rock and roll. They were engaged for five years before they married. I asked if they lived together and he said, "Yea, but I don't encourage it." They slept in separate rooms the last four months



*Leslie Jr. and Mary Jordan, Wedding Day*



before they married. They were married in 2001 at Woodard's Pond Church of Christ. Today, they still attend the church together.

After getting married, Leslie gained three stepdaughters, and one step-son. Through them, he has gained nine grandchildren. We all love Leslie to pieces and there's nothing he and my grandmother wouldn't do for us. For Mary and Leslie's honeymoon, they went to Texas, where most of her family lives. They drove straight there, and on the way back, they took the long way home and stopped to see historic sites.

They lived in Whichard's Beach for a few years before it was sold and then moved to Asbury Church Road, where Leslie already had a trailer. They lived in that trailer for a while and then

upgraded not long after. A few years went by, and Leslie and Mary decided to reconstruct an old house that sat on the land he and his family had lived on when Leslie was a child. It's now a beautiful home. He has worked extremely hard on bringing the house back to life. It makes me happy to see them settled into their dream home. Now my grandmother can feel a bit relieved that he has slowed down.

As our conversation faded off and the time got closer to my grandfather and grandmother's time to go back to church, I asked with curiosity what the most important thing in life that Leslie has learned was, and he told me, "Always be Honest and love the Lord, and always be a person of your word."



*Leslie Jr., Pauline, Sybil, Mary Alice, Edith, Leslie*

# Vincenzo Cilluffo

## *The American Dream*

Joseph Di Paula

I will introduce to you a man who I think represents an individual from another country coming to America in search of the American dream and with hard work and dedication, achieved success. I would say that this man has a rich life both in family and in friends in Washington, N.C. Plus, he is a role model to many, as well as someone to look up to and value his opinion when it's given. This man is Vincenzo Cilluffo.

In a town called Carini, a province of Palmaro of Sicilia, Italy, in 1961, Giuseppa Mannino Cilluffo gave birth to Vincenzo Cilluffo. Vinnie (short for Vincenzo) came to the United States when he was 15. When he



*Vinnie and Tony*

lived in Sicily, he mainly did carpentry.

Vinnie decided to immigrate to Brooklyn, New York, to go to college, and at the time an American education was the

education to have. During these years, the only problem he had

was that he was overwhelmed by people making fun of his accent. Therefore, he just lost interest in college.

He then moved to Summerdale, NJ, for one year. After working in Summerdale, then in Richmond VA, for three years, he decided to work for some friends in Philadelphia. He worked for his uncle there for twelve years learning the restaurant trade and did

everything from running the register to making pizzas, unloading trucks of product, and delivering pizzas.

It was in Philadelphia that he met his wife, Maryann. She would go see him while she was on lunch from her job at the shoe store down the block. After some time and a few years went by, they got married in 1985. After 12 years of saving, and after the birth of their beautiful baby daughter Christina in February of 1986, they figured they had enough money to open up a business along with a business partner here in Washington NC.

After three years, Vinnie's business partner had to leave to go back to Italy. That is when his brother Tony, who had been working for Vinnie the past three years, decided to enter into the business and bought out the other's share. Vinnie tells me the first six months after Frank's Pizza opened up in the Washington Square Mall, "I made tons of friends the first six months we were opened." What that means to me is that he likes to make people happy and sees people as friends, not just as customers.

The restaurant has moved twice since the mall, to its current location at 815 John Small Avenue. At one time they had opened and run a restaurant in Greenville NC, but decided to close due to the hours that Vinnie and Tony, along with their wives had to invest.

Their restaurant has great food along with service to the people he likes and loves in the town of

Washington. From the time I spent with this man, I found that his culture is one of every one is family, and he will do what he can, within reason, to help anyone.



*Vinnie and MaryAnn*

One thing Vinnie also has a passion for is coaching soccer. Vinnie is involved in multiple teams. Of course, his love for soccer most likely stemmed from Italian football (soccer in America), which in Italy is a major sport, especially the world cup. Not only does he coach, he also

sponsors multiple teams and donates to different nonprofit organizations.

He and his family love to give to back the community. As you sit in the restaurant, you can see all the walls of appreciation plaques, awards, and framed appreciation letters.

On Thursday, June 30, 2011, the most unfortunate and tragic thing happened. Antonio "Tony" Cilluffo, Vinnie's brother and co-owner of Franks Pizza, drowned while swimming at Indian Beach. It happened while on a weekend vacation with his family and friends. Going to the beach was one of Tony's favorite pastimes.

Of course, this was a very sad and unexpected time for the family. Since Tony's and Vinnie's families were so close—they worked together at the restaurant, played together at the beach, and spent holidays together—it hit harder. Yet, it also that gave them more wonderful and lasting memories.

Tony was just like his brother Vinnie, almost a double in the type of a person he was. The funeral

mass took place at Harvest Church in Washington. To better understand the impact that Tony made in the community, well over 1,000 people attended. Burial followed at Oakdale Cemetery. Flowers were sent to the restaurant and people donated money to his children's trust fund.

I asked Vinnie why he liked Washington North Carolina. He said "I love the people here, and I will live here for the rest of my life. My brother is buried down the street, and I have plots for me and my and my wife there as well." He and his wife MaryAnn, along with Tony's wife Jennette, still work at the restaurant today—as a family.

Usually once or twice a year for about two weeks, Vinnie and MaryAnn fly back to Carini, Sicilia, Italy, to vacation and spend time with his family that still lives there. I have sat down with Vinnie and MaryAnn a number of times, and I have never felt so welcomed before in my life. It was as if I was family to them.



*Tony and Family*

Like I had said before, my grandfather was born in Cefalu, Sicilia, Italia. I also like to improve and test my Italian language knowledge. So whenever I go and see him or eat there, I will speak to him in Italian as much as I can to see how much I can converse with him in his native language.

He has been a help with it because I want to be able to speak well enough so that when I go to Cefalu and Rome, I don't sound like a fool, and people can understand me.



*Vinnie and Family*

It has been, and continues to be an honor knowing him. He is a man who has triumphed through personal, life, and business issues. I consider him a man of wisdom, and I know that if I ever needed his thoughts on something, he will be happy to oblige. He is a pillar of the community, a man to look up to, and the type of person whom I hope to become.

# Frances Wilkins

*“You’ve Gotta Stand Tall When So Many Things Are Against You.”*

Theresa Fox Reason

**F**rances Wilkins, I have always said, was my “first North Carolina Angel,” but she usually shakes her head, smiling, almost declining the angelic honor that she most assuredly deserves. Frances is a Proverbs 31 woman who “...is worth far more than rubies and gold...,” and so I am glad to call her my dear friend and “second mother.”

It is nothing short of an honor to be able to capture, in words, valuable pieces of Frances’ life and to share them. I learn from her example always.

When I first met Frances about eight years ago, I was working as a cashier in the Plymouth Food Lion, and it was about ten minutes before closing. She had



*Frances Wilkins*

such a cheerful disposition when she came through my line to check out. We talked. Small talk turned into a spiritually enhanced conversation about both of us being Christian women raising children. Her beautiful, kind, and sincere blue eyes were striking, and there was an inflection in her voice that made me feel so cared for and comfortable. Little did I know it, but that was

the preface in to the everlasting story and effect that Frances Wilkins would have in my life and in the lives of so many other people.

Frances’ journey did not start in Eastern North Carolina but rather in the mountains of Virginia on a little farm called Burke’s Garden. There, on August 16, 1958, she was born to Katherine and Harland

Blackburn, Jr. Frances was the seventh of ten siblings. Her oldest brother was Lee, then Jerry, Shirley Mae and Ray, Kathy, Drema, Frances, John, Jody and finally Ricky.

I asked Frances how she got along with her brothers and sisters growing up, and she looked at me with very serious eyes: “If we fought, we fought in private. The family worked together, and we were raised to be trustworthy.” Frances adopted her late mother’s point of view that, “your respect is one thing that when you’ve lost it, it would take you forever to get it back.” She has always held her mother and father in the highest esteem.

At Burke’s Garden, Frances’ family made their own butter, cheese, tended the apple orchards, raised chickens, pigs, and some cattle. “Nothing was ever thrown away,” she says. “If we couldn’t use it, it went to slop for the animals.” She remembers that her mom only made fried chicken on Sundays in order to preserve the eggs for the week. Her mom made two dozen eggs and 50 homemade biscuits every morning for the family. Frances’ eyes light up like a child as she holds her hands out in larger-than-life square

proportions, exclaiming how big her mother’s bread pans were.



*Frances with Dad, Harland Blackburn, Jr.*

with a tribe of cattle hands and cowboys, became the first farmer ever to breed Black Angus cows and Buffalo. They called it “Beefalo.” For Frances, cattle life was all around her as a child.



*Frances’ Dad with cowboys*

her sister Kathy, who is also her best friend, would peer from the kitchen window, wanting always to get their chores done and “...

When Frances was about nine years old, her family moved from Burke’s Garden in Whitten Valley to what is now the famous Addison Land & Cattle Co., in Tazewell County, Virginia. There, her daddy managed thousands of acres of cattle. The Homestead, or main house on the farm where Frances’ family lived, was a large, two-story, white house with a spiral staircase around the back of it. As she describes this new life on the cattle farm, she proudly de-

scribes how her father, along

I was intrigued by this touch of the Old West as Frances described the cowboys that worked on the farm. Frances and her sisters were implicitly told by their mother not to ever go near the cowboys, which made them more of a secret temptation. Frances and

vroom... get out of the house!” They both loved to ride horses and spy on the cowboys working on her father’s cattle ranch. She says playfully “I mean! Those Cowboys were some fine ones too.”

Frances’ face changed to that of a proud, protective older sister as she describes to me a time when her brother John, who was only two years younger than herself, at the age of eight, was helping their daddy with welding metal racks on to the back of a welding truck for the farm. One of the pipes caught on fire, and a fierce explosion occurred. Frances’ daddy jumped through the flames and grabbed John, whose entire right side of his head, hair and hands were scorched. Frances said it looked like “meat-skin.”

John and Frances were always close and still are. Frances remembers staying with John in the hospital, and she would bring and feed him homemade cookies and would use a straw to give her younger brother some milk through the one side of his mouth that wasn’t burnt shut. Frances tells me that John still to this day works here in North Carolina as a welder. She says, “You have to be proud of where you’ve come from to be glad of where you are now.” Frances, even as a child, was unique and selfless. She has a beautiful spirit that never stops giving.

When Frances was sixteen years old, a gentleman from Raleigh, North Carolina, by the name of Sigh Rich, convinced her daddy to move to Eastern

North Carolina and manage some of his property. Frances recalls thinking, “Wow! The beach!” She imagined it would be just like Atlantic Beach with

sparkling blue waves and endless miles of resort-like sand which she always saw in commercials on the television. However, this dreamy beach-scape was not where the family landed.

Instead, her parents, Frances, and her three younger brothers moved to Hyde County, North Carolina, in Ponzer, “up on Newlake Road.” She describes the culture shock, and especially the

“MOSQUITOS” with eyes wide open and mouth to the floor. However, Frances managed to fall in love with Tar Heel dirt as soon as her feet hit its ground although she concedes that “everything was so different here on the coast.”

She remembers, almost with a bit of disgusted confusion which tickled me, when her daddy first took her to the beach. He took her down to Gull Rock in Hyde County, which she describes as being down a long dirt road that led into the middle of a swamp. She thought at the time, “This is horrible.” Frances has had a life-long terror of water. Laughing at herself, she calls to mind her momma telling of when she was much younger, playing by the creeks of the mountains. Frances would graciously decline, urging every time, “Momma, I just don’t want to get my panties wet.” Frances has always faced life’s adversities with gumption and full-fledged grace in every stead.

*“Nothing was ever thrown away,” she says. “If we couldn’t use it, it went to slop for the animals.” She remembers that her mom only made fried chicken on Sundays in order to preserve the eggs for the week. Her mom made two dozen eggs and 50 homemade biscuits every morning for the family.*

Frances began attending John A. Wilkinson High School and noticed that about 70 percent of the kids in her school were African American. This wasn't the case for her in the three-room school house she attended, The Cove, back in Whitten Valley, Virginia. "It was a tough adjustment as a teenager, you know." It wasn't a matter of prejudice at all because her parents did not raise her to harbor such thoughts or feelings. Rather it was simple culture shock.

During Frances' junior year in high school, she was getting off of the bus after school and the bus driver said, "Mmm, I wish I had a swing like that!" Frances turned around and gave him "the bird." With much dismay, Frances' mom sees her flick off the bus driver, and by the time the bus went up the road and turned back around, Frances and her mom were standing by the side of the road waiting. Frances says, "Do you know that I was in 11th grade, and my momma made me ask that bus driver to forgive me?" Frances told her mother what the driver had said and she replied, "Frances, you don't have to answer to God for what he said. You answer to God for what you do. And a lady does not act that way."

Soon Frances began to make friends, and she learned how to have fun on the coast. She found joy in the beautiful North Carolina summers and would frequent the Inland Water Way Bridge with her brothers where she and other teenagers would have food and music while they played and danced. She learned to adjust more by going out fishing, frogging and crabbing off of Sigh Rich's land that backed directly up to the Inland Water Way.

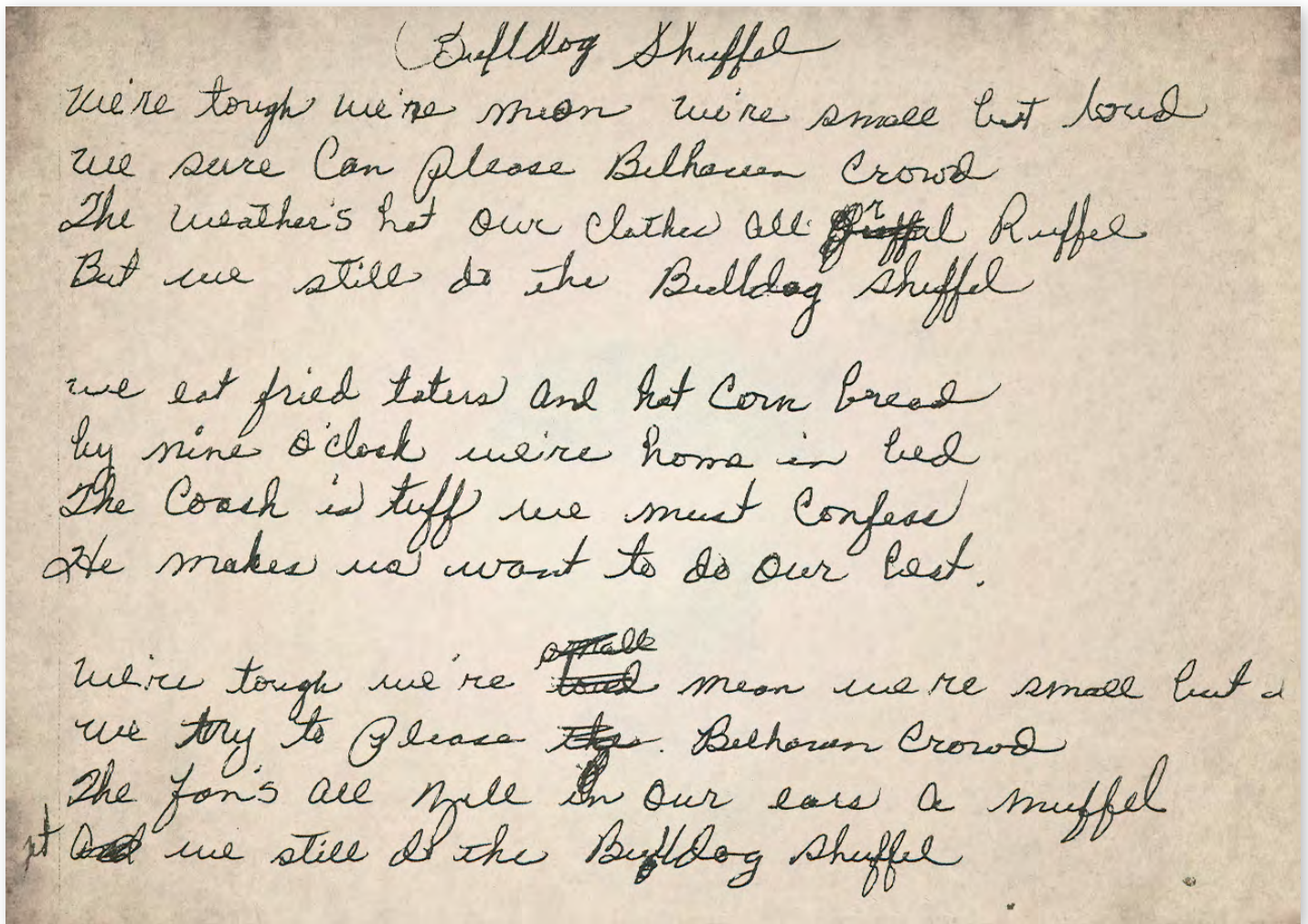
For years, Frances and her daddy and brothers used to catch and throw back the "ugliest fish I'd ever seen that had spur-like things on them." It wasn't until many years later that they realized they were catching catfish, which were not heard of in the mountains, but ended up being "some good eating!" Frances went from eating steak on the cattle farm to seafood on the North Carolina coast. It was a fine merging of surf and turf and a nice transition for her as a young woman, knowing how to live off of the land.

Frances' parents also fell into Eastern North Carolina society with great ease. They even bought a little yellow and white 18 foot boat because they loved to fish. It was their way of "getting out" on the weekend. And when Fran-



*Frances' yearbook photo*





ces' younger brothers started to play football for the Belhaven Bulldogs, her mother came up with a crowd pleasing cheer she called the "Bulldog Shuffle." "My momma was my very best friend," she said.

Frances' mom died eight years ago from lung cancer. "She was the type of mom that I could talk to about anything. Whether it was 'so and so is smoking pot or so and so is skipping school' ...My momma would just listen to me and we'd talk, but she never condemned anyone." Frances' unending kindness, flourishing wisdom and immutable love for God are mixed in the magnificent aroma of her "true soul."

One of Frances' "sweetest memories" was visiting her momma in the hospital when she was too sick to hold herself up and so "I held her, like a baby be-

*"Bulldog Shuffle" by Frances' Mom*

cause she was so sick." Frances' mother told her just before slipping away, "Nothing, absolutely nothing in this world lasts forever, except for God's promise."

Frances says that she always knew she wanted to go in to the medical field. She went to Mount Olive College "back in ancient times" and received their "One-Year Medical Secretary" degree. Frances did very well at Mount Olive, but she had a "terrible, terrible" time with short hand. In fact, her annual report card was written in short hand and she could never understand it. After her sister and best friend Kathy finished Nursing School, she moved to North Carolina and continues to live in Belhaven today with her own family.

Soon after returning home from college, Frances met James Linton at the Tastee Freeze in Belhaven. "It used to be the hang out," she said. Also, Brook's Grill was another hangout. If you went to the Grill, like James mostly did, you were drinking and partying and deemed a "redneck." If you hung out at the Tastee Freeze, like Frances mostly did, you were known as a "hinky." But "we would all get together and we used to have the best time," she said.

Frances was married to James Linton in 1980, and she gave birth to two handsome, talented boys named Joshua and Bradford. Josh was 10 and Bradford was 3 when their dad left. Frances describes James' leaving her and the boys after 13 years of marriage: "He just needed to find himself, and it just wasn't with a wife and two small children."

Frances went through feats of abysmal proportions as a single mother. Yet, she persisted on being the best mother and provider to her children. With two boys under foot and an ongoing, enriching career in the medical field as the first PSR coordinator for the state at Pungo District Hospital, then as a key medical transcriptionist and nurse for both Dr. Boyette and Dr. Ward in Belhaven, Frances managed to run a tight yet loving and smooth ship at her home in Pungo. Her two boys used to say "well, mom, why don't we have..." and she used to stop them and say "No, no. You don't know what blessings God has in store for us."

Frances recalls doing many "Momma projects." She says, "I've made many a Tee-Pee out of Solo cups." Josh's Kindergarten teacher, Mrs. White, would always ask Frances to help with class projects or make cupcakes, and one day Frances went in to Mrs. White and assured her that she didn't mind helping out in any way with Josh's class. But in earnest, "Is there no other mother that does anything in here?" And Mrs.

White said, "Frances, anytime I even begin to ask the children if their parents can help, Josh raises his hand and says 'My momma can do it, my momma can do anything!'" She would construct papier-mâché piñatas for Bradford's class one day, and the next she was getting her certification to drive the bus for Josh's school field trips. She even paid for any children who couldn't go on bus trips, because she couldn't stand the idea of a little child missing a field trip.

On top of single-handedly keeping up her four-acre piece of land, push mowing it, gardening and landscaping, Frances managed to create a Hallmarkesque home for the boys to be proud of. She also raised animals on her property like goats and chickens. They had the Bouffant chicken and the Arcadian chicken, which is an Easter Egg laying chicken. She had a host of different types of chickens so that Josh would be able to celebrate the variances in them. In fact, Frances has chickens even now.

During Frances' seven or so years as a single mother, her prayer was always for God to send her a good, Christian man who would love and help take care of her children. But that if it was not God's plan for Frances to remarry, that He would give her the strength to "go it alone." She dated some, but she knew right away that the people she dated were not right for her.

Before beginning a new career at Tri-County Telecom as head of Accounts Receivable, Frances went on a date with Robert Wilkins, who she knew a little, as she had graduated with his younger brother from high school. She said that on one of their first dates, as Rob was talking about his own three children, "the love that I saw in his eyes," and getting to know his soul had Frances quickly falling in love with him. Frances and Rob met October 6, 1999. The gravity of his love for Frances and the boys convinced him to

give her a diamond engagement ring at Christmas, and they were married February 26th, 2000.

The following Christmas after Frances and Rob were married, Bradford wrote a note to Rob telling him that God had finally given him everything he ever wanted for Christmas, a dad. “Rob has been a blessing to us and we have some wonderful times,” Frances announces proudly.

Rob had two boys, Daniel and Matthew, and a girl, Rachel from a previous marriage. And the only way that Frances and Rob knew how to love their children was “to love them like they were all ours.” Frances and Rob have five children all together, and they treat them all the same. Frances, like her mother, always keeps her bed open for her children to come and talk with her to show them that no matter how old they are, as long as she is alive, her children will know that they can come to her about anything.

“All of our children are grown now but we have four grandchildren and one on the way.” Josh’s step son is Nick who is 7, Noah is 6, Oliver is 5, and Olivia, my own daughter, is 8. Bradford is expecting a daughter soon.

When I think about working hard, I think about Frances. My own mother used to tell me “if it’s a job worth doing, it’s a job worth doing right,” but she

didn’t show me this all the time. Frances does. She recounts how her dad used to say, “You give a man a day’s work for a day’s pay.” But, she believes that amidst all of the hard work “you have to have some joys, some peace, some pride and some happiness.”

Creating charming stained glass pieces, basket making, collecting antique butter churns and canners are amongst Frances’ many hobbies. Last year she also canned over 300 pints and quarts of



*Frances's Canning*

salsa, tomatoes, potatoes, green beans, apples, apples and cinnamon, blueberries, apple juice, tomato juice, pickles, relish, beets and over 130 quarts of string beans. She points out that a lot of people here have never heard of canning potatoes. She goes on to explain that here in Eastern North Carolina the growing period is so much longer than in the mountains and that there is a lot of peat in the soil making gardening so much better on the coast. She says, “We do our children a great injustice when we do not teach them how to live off of the land.”

When I asked Frances what she would most want her family legacy to be, she replied “for them to know my soul.” She looked at me intently and I could see that her eyes are a window to her beautiful soul. “A person’s wealth is determined by their soul inside, because all of the material things don’t equal up to all of the love in your soul and the genuine love of God and people.”

Rob and Frances worship at Wilkinson Church of Christ in Pantego, where she has attended for about 25 years and has sung in the choir. Frances, Josh, and Bradford were all blessed with the beautiful talent of singing. Frances says they get it from their dad. This may be partly true, but I have had the pleasure of hearing Frances’ sweet voice, and it is nothing short of being touched by an angel.

Rob and Frances are retired now. She is happy. She spends her days in prayer. She prays for peace and for all of the people who are so sick. She prays for God to help her to accept what life puts on her; also, that she might do at least one special thing for someone every day. Three days a week Frances cooks and does crafts with friends of hers in the community, Ms. Rachel who is 96 and Ms. Sally who is a retired school teacher.

Frances very recently started volunteering with the Belhaven Senior Citizens where there is a “quilting guild,”

and the elderly ladies show off the quilts they’ve made. There is exercising for the Senior Citizens where they don’t have to leave their chairs. Frances helps out with these activities and also checks blood pressure and manages snacks to suit everyone’s diet. I asked how she liked doing this, and without hesitation she exclaimed, “I love it because I am a people person.”

Like her own parents, Frances has the knack of bringing meaning to every barrier she comes up against, whether it is with her children, with work, with matters of the heart and spirit, or with something as simple as walking through the grocery store in the dark of the night, taking time to brighten up this tired cashier’s otherwise dull evening. She has the rare talent of showing compassion, wisdom, and an unparalleled wit to all that cross her path. Frances stands in the middle of spiritual storms and does not pray for the calm, but instead the strength to withstand the waves crashing and wind blowing around her, being content, thankful for her strong foundation in Christ

and faith in His Might in her life. I often hear her say “You’ve gotta stand tall when so many things are against you.”

She goes on, “Life is like a sand castle and you go out and you spend time building this beautiful sand castle with all of these rooms, and it

makes you happy. And the tide comes in and washes it away.



*Frances and Theresa*

That's the way life is. You spend your moments building memories with people that you love and then life comes in and sometimes swoops all of that away, and all you have are those moments and those memories."

One thing that I love and admire about Frances is that no matter how many times her "sand castle" gets washed away, she is never bitter. Instead, she

reaches out with helpful, willing hands and with sincere eyes, grabs someone else up by the arms and lifts them up to higher places. She is worthy of trust, in every dimension. Frances celebrates her foundation of God. "Like I said," she continues gently "the only thing that lasts is God's Word, and when you build your life on His foundation, it's never taken away."





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HUM 120 Cultural Studies  
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This course introduces the distinctive features of a particular culture. Topics include art, history, music, literature, politics, philosophy, and religion. Upon completion, students should be able to appreciate the unique character of the study culture. This course has been approved to satisfy the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement general education core requirement in humanities/fine arts.



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).

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