



every day grace

MAGA I
Issue o 3



Rural

For some folks, rural is an intangible state of mind. For others, it invokes an agricultural image. For demographers and the government, it is merely a geographic area with certain characteristics, based on population, types of work opportunities, or proximity to a metropolitan area.

However you choose to define rural, the 2010 US Census gives us this information: 34 percent of North Carolina's population is considered rural. In the 56 counties within the North Carolina (UMC) Conference boundaries, 51 counties are classified as rural (having 250 persons or less per 1 square mile).

In the pages of this issue of Every Day Grace Magazine are plain but powerful, simple yet intriguing, humble and honest stories of

eastern North Carolina women. Hard-working women. Unassuming women. Brave women. Rural women. They may not have realized that they even had a story until someone asked them to put some words on paper and yet, each story is sacred. Joy. Heartache. Courage. Hope. Perseverance. Life.

EDG Magazine is a publication of the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. We thank the gracious women who shared their stories. Thanks to Suzanne Cobb, Jimmy Cobb, Kasey Thornton, Linda Harris, Linda Smith, and LeeAnne Thornton for contributing to the artwork and photography.

May these stories be a reflection that in every minute of every life is a story, waiting to be told.



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City Girl Goes Country

by Suzanne Cobb

On July 29, 2011 at 8:36 a.m., the phone rang at the parsonage, I could see it was someone from the Methodist Building, so I answered it.

“Hey Suzanne, this is Becky Biegger in the Bishop’s office. He would like to meet with you to discuss a ministry opportunity. He will meet you tonight in the District office at 6 p.m.”

It was Friday and the Bishop was going to drive to Sanford to meet with me... uh oh... this is something big. I immediately called my husband, Jimmy, and said, “We are going to have to delay our trip to the mountains. The Bishop has called and wants to meet with me... tonight!!”

When I arrived at the District office and he began to talk about the people in Milwaukee, I remember thinking, “Why is he talking about Wisconsin?” I never knew there was a Milwaukee, North Carolina, but I soon found out it was going to be my home, and for the next four years, the people he had been talking about became my family.

One of my first memories was when, as I stood in the living room of the beautiful parsonage, looking out the window at a field across the

street, I panicked. I called my friend Sherri. “What have I done? I am a city girl and I don’t know the first thing about living in a place like this!”

I heard her familiar voice on the other end of the phone saying, “Breathe. All you have to do is love the people and remember God is with you.” I clung to that promise, but it didn’t take long for the “city” to come out in me.

One day, I was driving down Doolittle Mill Road and I noticed that the cotton plants had turned brown. Hurricane Irene had come through Milwaukee about a week before I moved there, and when I saw the beautiful plants were turning brown. I called Jimmy, again in a panic.

“Oh my gosh. I think the hurricane has killed the cotton! The plants have turned brown. The farmers are going to be so upset!” He started laughing on the other end of the phone and explained to me that was part of the process of harvesting the cotton. The plants have to die so they can pick it. Well, that was the first of many experiences of this city girl goes country!



I was the first female pastor to serve the Milwaukee Charge. I remember standing in the pulpit at Bethany UMC, looking out into the congregation of farmers and feeling like Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*, when Lumiere and Cogsworth saw her for the first time, saying, “It’s a girl.” Then by Christmas, I felt like they were looking at me and maybe thinking, “It’s a girl, and she can preach.”

This city girl grew to love those farmers who looked at me that way, and I have such admiration for their intelligence, perseverance and faith in a vocation that makes such a difference in God’s Kingdom!

The sweet potatoes, cabbage, and the corn that came out of the fields that the farmers so tenderly nurtured were the best I had ever eaten. Why?

Because they would pick them and bring them straight to the parsonage! No preservatives, no refrigeration. They were fresh, sweet and oh, so good. I remember one day, James Russell brought me a head of cabbage and I ate the whole thing for lunch and dinner by myself!

This wonderful community soon learned that this city girl couldn't tell the difference between a soybean plant from a peanut plant and they loved me anyway! They learned to calm my fears when I would see smoke billowing into the sky and I would think that somebody's house was on fire, only to discover it was a "prescribed burn" where they had to occasionally burn off the fields to improve the health of the soil. They laughed at me when I couldn't figure out what the stench was in the whole "neighborhood." Who knew that chicken poop made good fertilizer and that they saved it to put on the fields?

Yes, my life changed on September 1, 2011 when I moved to Milwaukee, NC. I followed Sherri's advice and loved the people in that community and they loved this city girl back. I often told them that I felt like they live more like the Israelites did than any place I had ever lived. They truly live in community with one another! I am not saying that they all agreed, but they do love one another.

While I served there, we honored the sages, from the musicians to the lifelong members. We had the first Confirmation class in ten years, where we journeyed through the scriptures, researched



what it meant to be a United Methodist and I even taught them how to put furniture polish on hardwood floors of the parsonage for an impromptu slip and slide! I baptized eleven infants, buried their loved ones, performed several weddings and celebrated weekly worship with the people of the Milwaukee Charge. I love them, even though as a United Methodist pastor, I had to move on. The people in the Milwaukee Charge will forever have a piece of this city girl's heart.

²⁵ She is strong and respected and not afraid of the future.

²⁶ She speaks with a gentle wisdom.

*Proverbs 31:25-26
(Good News Translation)*

Puny, Pitiful & Pathetic

by Anne Outland

What makes a school teacher so special? First, my background of becoming a teacher. I was born in the small community of Woodland, NC in 1934, where I had the freedom to express myself through play, exploring and family.

As a child, I suffered from frequent bouts of asthma brought on by having colds. As a result, I have always been protective of my health. Some of my friends say I'm too careful. As a joke, I call myself "Puny, Pitiful and Pathetic." My friends enjoy teasing me about these words.

I don't have asthma anymore, but suffer from chronic allergies which have required two nose operations to remove nasal polyps. As I age, this condition seems to have abated. Praise God!

I laugh when I say I'm "puny," but in reality, I'm quite active and have always been – playing basketball and tennis in high school, walking daily now for an hour or more, and doing yard work. So I guess the joke's on me.

When I was 9 years old, I expressed myself too well. The family went to another town and because

After college, I began my career of teaching second grade in Ahoskie, NC. I must have liked that grade level because I taught it for 30 years.

I couldn't be found, (probably up a tree) they left without me.

When they returned, I was sitting at the end of the driveway and instead of saying, "Where have you all been?" I said, "Where the hell have you been?" Daddy immediately stopped the car, causing my mother to nearly go through the windshield. No questions were asked, and before God and all the traffic on Highway 258, I got the biggest spanking of my life.

He left me there crying and later returned with the car and said, "Get in the car, Anne." We went to the store and got me a bag of candy. Needless to say, I learned the meaning of that word.

Because my mother and father went to college, there was never any question that my sister and I would not be going to college as well. During the early 1950s, most young girls studied to be a teacher, nurse or secretary.

I left home for the first time in my life to go to East Carolina College in 1952. I had no idea what my major was going to be. I tell the story that I saw a large group of students sitting in an auditorium, so I joined them. I found out that we were going to be teachers. Of course, I had a counselor who encouraged me to follow that course of study.

I realized the importance of studying to make passing grades because my parents had two

girls in school at the same time. My sister and I roomed together for two years. We worked as dormitory hostesses. Signing date cards, approving off campus passes, and locking doors at night was part of our job.

Late one afternoon, we received a telegram telling us that we were invited out to dinner. We were to meet in the parlor of our dormitory at 6 p.m. Well, she and I got dressed, went to the parlor and no one called for us. We were "stood up," so we thought. Not until later did we find out that our classmates across the hall played this joke on us. We still laugh about it today.

While changing classes at E.C.C., I met my favorite history professor, Dr. Coleman. We had a short conversation and I told him I would be graduating this year (1956). He said, "Na-a-a-ah, you'll be too little."

According to many comments written in my annuals from classmates, I must have really enjoyed my four years, and I know I did, because it sounded like I was always "cutting up."

After college, I began my career of teaching second grade in Ahoskie, NC. I must have liked that grade level because I taught it for 30 years. After retirement, I substituted for another 17 years. I taught music for a year, pushing my cart with all the equipment, laughing and saying, "I just love my job!" The pay was terrible, but the fun made up for it.

I have met so many appreciative parents in Hertford and Northampton counties, but especially memorable were the students from Pre-K to third grade. Now that I'm retired, I meet many of my former students and expressions of love and appreciation for me has blessed me enormously.

Being an "Old Maid" (and if you don't know what that means, I've never been married), I've had to learn other crafts – carpentry, working on

engines, painting, etc. My friend and I look after each other in these matters. We call ourselves "Patch and Pray Ladies."

One time at around 11 years old, a friend called by phone and my mother said, "She's probably on the roof or up a tree." That's just who I am.

So, as you can see, God truly has blessed me, and still does, in a mighty way.



“Is That Snow?”

by Esther Kuhn

Since moving to Northampton County, I have learned a lot about country living. I was raised in the city by a Methodist father, a Jewish mother and I married a Catholic.

Before marriage, I attended the Methodist Church; after marriage, we went to the Episcopal Church and when my husband died, I returned to the Methodist Church. Who says you can't mix denominations? It only takes love and consideration for one another. In my family, we have Baptist, Catholic, Methodist and non-denominational, and we all love each other.

My mother said very little about her Jewish religion. In those days, they were not well thought of and it was difficult for Jewish people. When my grandfather and grandmother came to this country from Russia and Romania, they changed their name from Silverman to Taylor. My grandfather was a tailor, so he settled for the name Taylor.

My mom and dad got married young. My dad was still in college, my mom had moved to Virginia from Connecticut. Their marriage ended his college days, and his new life as a married man



began with a little Jewish woman. Dad was an only child, so it was back home to his parents with his bride.

My mother was so kind and patient; she lived with my grandmother for 43 years. They never had a cross word, but they gave the chair a fit. Mama would turn a chair one way, Grandma would go by the chair, notice it had been turned and she would turn it back. That was the extent of their disagreement. My mom was so good to my grandmother. When my grandma was taken to the hospital, where she later died, she looked at my Mom and said "Jennie." My mom said, "I'm coming," and she stayed with her until she died.

Sunday afternoon always was a quiet day – no skates, bikes or being loud; no movies or shopping; certainly no grass cutting or washing clothes. No, Grandma wouldn't have that and to this day, I never wash clothes or cut grass on Sundays. This was one of Grandma's rules.

I had five sisters and one brother who was killed in an auto accident at 23 years old. It took a toll on my parents – the only son and only brother.

After Grandma died, my sisters, except for the baby sister and me, were married and in their own homes. My dad bought a home in Virginia Beach. So Daddy, Mama, Baby Sister and I moved to Virginia Beach.

I worked in Virginia Beach until I moved up north to be with my oldest sister. After ten years, I came back to Virginia Beach and married my husband. We moved to Southside, VA. After retirement, we wanted to be closer to family, but didn't want the hustle and bustle of the beach. We decided to look in North Carolina close to the Virginia line.

We rode down to Northampton County to see what it was like and on our way down, I saw little pieces of white along the side of the road. I said to my Yankee husband, "Is that snow?" He looked at me, shook his head and said "No, that's cotton." That was my first encounter with cotton.

We moved to Northampton County. I didn't realize at the time I would be surrounded by Duke, NC State and Tar Heel fans – me a University of Virginia Cavaliers fan. I was the only Virginia fan in the county.

A few years later, the Baptist church got a new preacher. Yea! He not only was from Virginia; he was a Cavalier fan. I was so glad to see him, I wanted to hug him but I didn't. That made two of us Virginia fans in Northampton County.



"Who says you can't mix denominations? It only takes love and consideration for one another."

While living up north for ten years, I met some very nice people. Yankees indeed! However, even though they were friendly and willing to help you, if you needed help, they were very cautious not to interfere. That was the impression I got from being around them.

After we had been in Carolina for a little while, I was outside as two young boys around 12 years of age came down the street. One was riding his bike, the other was pushing his. It had a flat tire. When they saw me, they asked if I had an air pump. I told them I did and got it. After pumping

the tire, they thanked me and went on their way—those two little boys of color.

As I was walking toward the door to go in, the lady next door drove up in her driveway. I really didn't know her as she hadn't been living there long. She said to me, "Those boys are bad, I just want you to know that."

I looked at her and said, "They just needed air in the tire."

Her next statement was, "Well, they are bad, I know because I teach them."

I looked at her and said, "They just wanted air in the tire." And with that we parted. As I was walking toward the door, I thought perhaps they needed a little more TLC.

I love Carolina sayings and humor. I remember after being here a while, I met one of the ladies and asked how she was. She said, "The ox is in the ditch."

"Oh," I said, "I didn't know you had an ox." She laughed and later I found out it means she had a problem. So much for this City Gal! And listen to this 90-year-old: when you see those white pieces on the side of the road, it's not snow... it's cotton!



"My mother was so kind and patient; she lived with my grandmother for 43 years. They never had a cross word, but they gave the chair a fit."

Farm Living Is The Life For Me

by Jonell Little

I am fortunate enough to live in what I think is the prettiest place on earth. It is in a big, old two-story farmhouse with a bright red roof, sitting back off the road, surrounded by pastures, a pond, and farm land. We have cows and calves grazing in the pastures, eagles, geese, and ducks flying around the pond, with deer and turkeys out in the fields. The sunrises and sunsets are spectacular and not so easily seen or enjoyed if you lived in the city. Rural/country life allows us to commune with nature and this beautiful world that God has created. With no city lights around, we can see the stars and the heavens at night. How lovely the sky is with the sparkle of the diamond-like stars.

I think that those of us who are blessed to live in the country can feel closer to God because the quiet and peacefulness of the rural setting. It allows us to see God's Majesty, and all the wondrous nature he has given us. How can we doubt God's power and grace?

My home is on a farm in rural northeastern Northampton County, North Carolina, where farms and agriculture are, and always have



been, the main business. The house was built in the late 1700s and owned for three generations by the Rogers Family. My father came to the farm around the age of 10, was raised by the Rogers family and lived here the rest of his life. He farmed with them and loved the life of a farmer. He married my mother and brought

her home to the farm. They lived here with the Rogers brothers and when the brothers died, they inherited the farm. I am an only child and I was born, raised, and have lived here my whole life, except for college years. It is the only place I have ever wanted to live.



⁷Be patient, then, my friends, until the Lord comes. See how patient farmers are as they wait for their land to produce precious crops. They wait patiently for the autumn and spring rains..

*James 5:7
(Good News Translation)*

As the old song on the Green Acres TV show said “Green acres is the place for me, farm living is the life for me.” That says just how I feel. Country living is just right for me. I was born in the 50s and enjoyed growing up on the farm. We were free to play outside all day and roam the woods without worrying about any danger. Our farm raised peanuts (my favorite crop), corn, cotton, wheat, and soybeans. I loved the smell of the dirt as it was tilled and planted, then the distinct smell when the peanuts were “dug” from the ground and harvested.

I learned to drive the tractors and trucks on the farm. If I had been born a few years later, I might have become ‘the farmer,’ but back then, women were not encouraged to farm on their own. It is still mainly a man’s profession, but women do farm alone now.

Farm wives have always helped their husbands and worked with them on the farm, but rarely did they farm it on their own. Prior to the 1970s, it wasn’t considered ladylike for women to run/work the farm. Things have changed and women do farm and have many occupations that were once considered things they could not or should not do.

When my husband, David, and I married forty years ago, we moved across the driveway from my parents’ home on the farm, and we have lived here all of our married life. We have one daughter, Beth, who is married and lives about

40 miles away. My husband and I farmed for a while, but his true passion is as a mechanic. He opened a small engine repair shop in a nearby town. We worked together in that business for 27 years. God blessed us with a good business. We had wonderful customers and friends who supported our business all those years.

My husband has had many hobbies over the years – flying, hunting, go-kart racing, which we did as a family, and then there is building his own flying machines! Being a mechanic, he knows how to fix things and put them together. This led to a desire to buy a kit and build a gyrocopter. This is a cross between a small helicopter and an ultra-light plane. He has built two of them. Needless to say, we are the only folks with one in our area and in the eastern part of the state, too!

It is a curious sight to see him flying around on his gyro. Everyone knows it's him. It flies low enough and slow enough, that you can see him and he us. Kids as well as the grown-ups enjoy seeing him fly over and waving. We have traveled to lots of states for "fly-ins," gatherings of other gyro pilots. He has used the gyro to help look for missing persons, lost cattle, dogs, and even once helped the Sheriff's Department look for the car of a murder suspect.

When my parents died, we moved into the "Big House," as we call the farm house. We want to continue to care-take this home that God has allowed to stand for all these years. We have

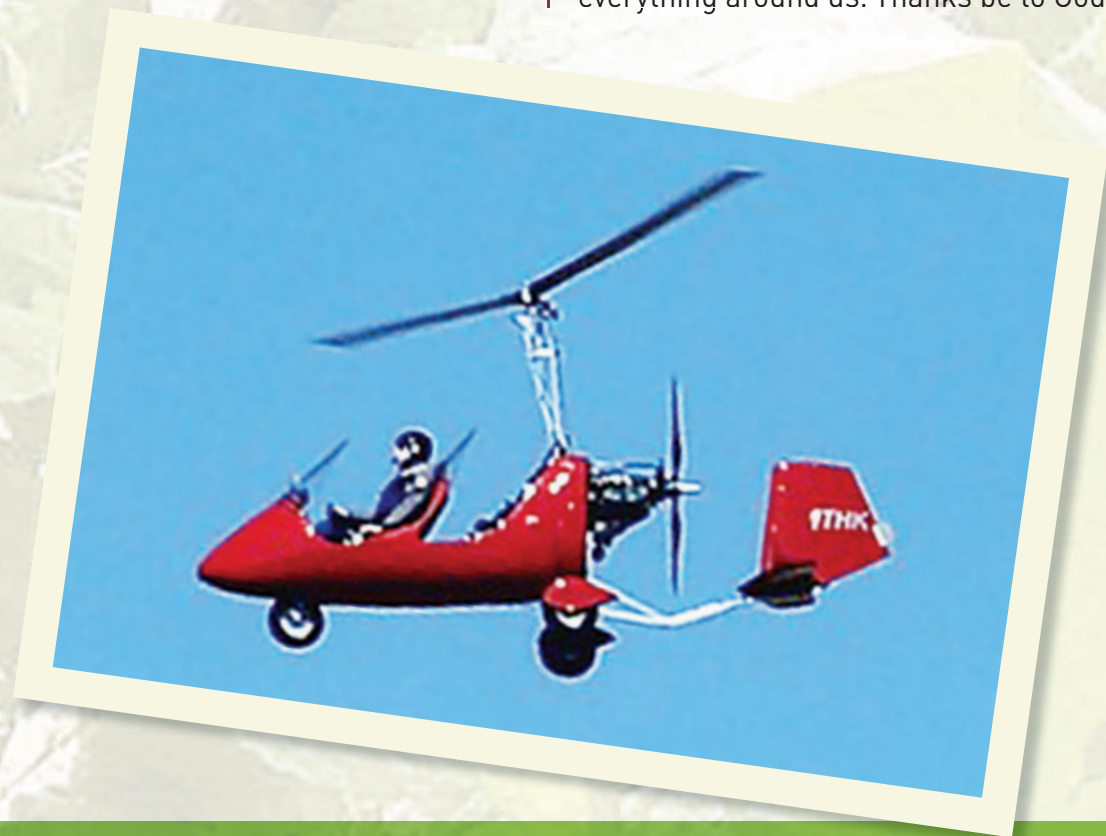
retired and are enjoying this phase of our lives now.

I am thankful for my Christian upbringing and all the blessings God has given me in my life. I belong to a lovely country Methodist Church just three miles down the road from my home. I have attended this church all my life. It was started as a bush arbor in the early 1830s. A church was constructed in 1839; later a new brick building was constructed, and remains there today. My mother's family were some of the founding members of that church. This church, as well as my parents, gave me a sure foundation of faith in God and the love of Jesus Christ. I

have had ups and downs like everyone, but God has been and is always present.

As I have grown, my faith has grown, too. We are so blessed to live in a country where we are free to worship without fear of persecution. What a blessing that is too. God is so good to us, loving us always, even when we stray. How wonderful it is to know that God is always there, in the good times as well as the bad times.

One of my favorite hymns is "In the Garden" and it reminds me of the joys of the quiet peaceful country life where we can walk and talk with God and see the wonders of his handiwork in everything around us. Thanks be to God!



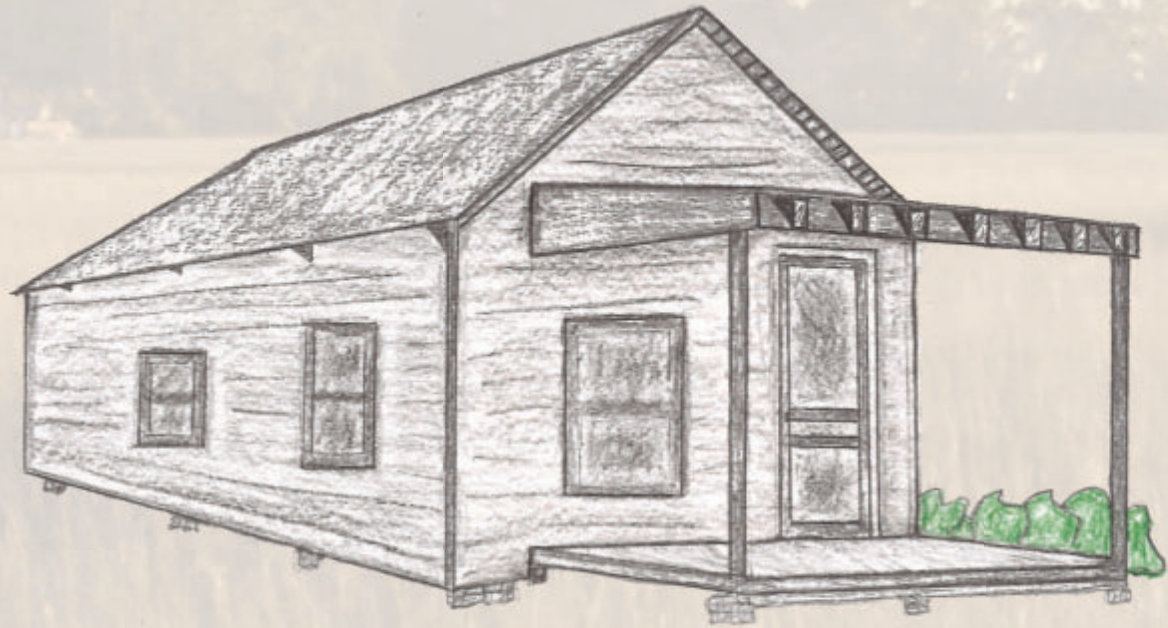
Just A Country Girl At Heart

by Blonnie B. Johnson

I am an 81-year-old woman who is just a country girl at heart. I was born December 1933, during the Great Depression. My early childhood was in a three-room tenant house on my Grandfather's farm. My father was a farmer by trade and heart. My mom grew up on a farm. My parents started their married life with \$150, borrowed from an uncle to furnish their three rooms. My father sold peanuts that first year for \$.90 per 100-pound bag. They loved the land, were hard workers and always provided for our family. My brother, four years my junior, and I had a wonderful childhood on the farm.

Starting out in those depression years must have been extremely hard for my parents, but I never felt the lack of anything I needed. I had loving parents, clothes on my back, food on the table and warmth in the cold winters. I remember studying by an Aladdin lamp, food cooked on a wood cook stove, outdoor toilet and warmth provided by a fireplace.

Roanoke Electric Cooperative was founded in 1939 to provide electricity for rural areas. Before we were fortunate enough to get electricity, my father



built a windmill and had power to run a radio and one or two light bulbs. I can remember the day when we received electricity but cannot remember the year. Over time, we got an electric cook stove and later a refrigerator and a deep freeze. My father added a room and we had our first indoor bathroom – what a luxury!

My father used his carpentry skills to add rooms to those three rooms and my brother and I had our own bedrooms. He continued to add rooms over the years until we had nine rooms. I am

proud to say that to this day, I live in the home where I was born and grew up because I am just a country girl at heart.

Through the years, my father raised cotton, peanuts, corn, grain sorghum, soybeans and wheat. He raised hogs that provided us with meat and we had a cow that provided us with milk. We always had a big vegetable garden. He was also remembered for the good sweet potatoes he raised. My father raised laying hens and provided eggs for a hatchery.

I grew up helping on the farm, chopping, picking cotton, stacking peanuts, turning potato vines and all the many jobs on the farm. To this day, I still mow my lawn and areas surrounding the farm buildings.

I knew, and still know, the hardships of farming, though it has changed greatly since my early years, when farming was done with mules, to this day of farming with high-dollar tractors and complete mechanization. It is still a profession with much stress and is such a big gamble. As Will Rogers said, "The farmer has to be an optimist or he wouldn't still be a farmer." Farmers can do everything just right but can be devastated by drought, too much rain, occasionally a hurricane, insects and an early frost or freeze. Farmers have to love the land and what they do to be happy and successful in the farming profession.

In my early years, church, school and family were important aspects of growing up. My family attended church every Sunday. I often think of those Sunday school teachers who taught of Jesus and his love for us. My school teachers were respected and loved and my family life was the best.

My first year of school started in a school building that still stands as a Civic Center in our little village of Milwaukee, NC. After a week or so of school in Milwaukee, the school bus would come to take us to the big school in Conway, but our teacher would send them back as Milwaukee wanted to

keep its school. It was finally determined that we would be combined with the school in Conway. Thus I started riding the big school bus to Conway. Each morning, as I left home, my little brother would stand on the porch and say, "Bye Thusta" (sister). Every afternoon, as I exited the bus at my home, all the kids on the bus would chime out, "Bye Thusta." Thus began my twelve years of school at Conway, where I received my high school diploma in 1952. My class met this year for our 63rd reunion. I am one of the few in my class who never left Northampton County.

I was a single Mom. My mother and father helped me raise my daughter on our family farm and kept her while I worked. She got to do country things - play outside, go fishing with her grandfather, play with her cat and enjoy nature. I feel she had a wonderful childhood filled with love and caring. She gave me my only precious granddaughter. That granddaughter has given me three wonderful and loving great granddaughters. How blessed this country girl has been!





Bethany United Methodist Church has played an important part in my life. My dad always played an important part in our church, either as an officer or teacher. He attended Bethany UMC until he was physically unable in his late 80s.

My church family has meant much to me through all these 81 years. I have tried to play a role in my church life as a teacher, working with the youth and as a member of the choir. My passion for others has been a driving force in my being able to help others when a need exists. At 81, I am able to deliver Meals on Wheels to members of the community who have this need and help deliver weekend backpack meals for underprivileged children to a local elementary school.

Bethany United Methodist Church is one of the four churches on the Milwaukee Charge. Severn, Woodland and Zion complete the charge. Our churches work together, worship together and pray together. In 1960, I was asked to be Charge Treasurer. I served in this capacity through 2012 and continue to serve as Assistant Treasurer. I appreciate the confidence these churches have placed in me over these many years.

In 1959, I started my work career with the Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Office, now the Farm Service Agency, in Northampton County. During the Great Depression, farming remained a common way of life for millions of Americans. The United States Department of Agriculture is the federal executive department responsible for developing and executing federal govern-

“Do not stop thinking of life as an adventure. You have no security unless you can live bravely, excitingly, imaginatively.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

ment policy on farming, agriculture, forestry and food. It aims to meet the needs of farmers, promote agricultural trade and production, work to assure food safety, protect natural resources, foster rural communities and end hunger in the United States and the world. We granted loans to farmers; administered land allotment and marketing quota programs; shared the cost of resource conservation and environment protection measures with farmers.

My passion was to work with, and for, the farmers of my county. I continued my work with farmers and the Agency until I retired in November 1996. I continue my involvement with farming as bookkeeper for my brother and cousin in their farming operation. I still have my passion and love for farmers who feed our nation and produce products that we Americans use every day of our lives.

I am blessed to live in the country, where I can look out from my home and see the sun rise in the morning, sun set in the evening, see the moon and stars, and crops growing around me in the beautiful world God created for us. What a blessed life I have had and continue to have as just a country girl at heart!

“Life Is Good”

by Doris Flythe

I was not born a Methodist. I gained that status by marrying a Methodist, Leon Flythe, and attending worship in his church. My church was not an option as it was more than two and a half hours away. I had been born Doris Dawson, into a Christian family, in Sampson County (Spivey's Corner), the youngest of seven living siblings. Religious practices had long been established—unless you were sick, you went to church on Sunday.

My mother was teaching the adult women. She began teaching at the age of 15 in the children's department and progressed upward. She retired at the age of 75 from a class that bore her name: The Bettie Dawson Bible Class of Shady Grove Original Free Will Baptist Church, saying, “60 years were long enough.”

My earliest memories include Jesus and what He did for us. I made my declaration of faith at the age of 10 and was baptized by total immersion in the local millpond.

My life was not greatly changed by this event, but I was accepted into the sacrament of foot washing which was carried out once a quarter, on a Saturday afternoon, of course, in segregated areas. It was a humbling experience to have my

feet washed, in a public setting, by an elderly lady and then, in turn, to wash hers. I have never forgotten that experience.

Books and magazines were a positive part of my childhood due mostly to my oldest sister, Mafalda, who was teaching school. National Geographic and Life magazines were both in our home when I started school as well as books for young people. We had most of the magazines popular in the 30s. Mafalda had a gentleman caller who sold magazine subscriptions. (Don't knock it. In the depths of the depression, any job was a good job.) Of course, I was not reading then, but I could look at the pictures “of the faraway places with the strange sounding names.” I never really expected to see any of them.

When I was 9, my sister, Anne, three years older than I, read *Little Women* to me and the passion for reading began. It has never stopped. Even on a noisy school bus, I could lose myself for the hour ride home. There were no Girl Scouts in our community, but I had their magazine: The American Girl.

High school coincided with World War II, 1941-1945. Gas was rationed, so there was no pleasure

riding. Sister Norma joined the Cadet Nurses and Anne left for college. My three brothers were married in homes of their own, leaving only me at home with my parents. We did not have a phone, so contact with friends was at church and school.

Books controlled the loneliness and took me to the faraway places. East Carolina Teacher's College and a degree in teaching took me to Northampton County (Milwaukee) to fill a mid-year vacancy at Conway High School. I met Leon in February and married him in December. We created a modest home and in four years, had three children.

I have to tell you about the loss of our daughter. I don't want to. Even after 62 years, it is painful to think about and difficult to put on paper. Leon wanted me to put her pictures away. He couldn't bear seeing them every day; the anguish would have destroyed him; so we buried her album in the closet and didn't talk about her. I know now that was possibly not the best way but what is-is.





It happened on a hot Saturday afternoon in 1953, three weeks before Julia Ann would have been 3. Leon was going to town. He put his arms around her, told her he loved her, that he would be back soon, and that tomorrow they would go to church together.

When we were expecting this first child, Leon wanted a girl. He had grown up with an older sister and five brothers. He was tired of boys. Julia Ann wrapped her fingers around his heart from the first minute. (She was born at home, so he saw the first minute.)

He got in his truck, backed in a circle to turn around, and found her lying in the driveway in front of him. The tire had run over her. There was no phone to call for help. He scooped her into his arms and drove four miles to the doctor's house. I couldn't go with him. There were Sandra (age 2) and Joseph (age three months) to care for. Julia Ann had surgery but it didn't help.

My "new" church family cleaned my house; filled it with food, flowers and love; brought a generous love offering and grieved with us. I could not allow myself to cry; it would have pushed Leon over the edge. I cried at night after he was asleep.

And life goes on. The next eight years added three children – Cathy, Mike and Blake – all cherished. They may not have known how much they were loved because it was difficult for us to show our feelings. Leon was a very compassionate man, but he lived with depression which he hid much of the time.

We became more active in the church. We were both in the choir. Leon claimed to be "filling a chair," but he had a wonderful voice he inherited from his mother. He served as a trustee for years. I taught and served ten years as Superintendent of Sunday School and on various committees.

Travel did come. We traveled by car through most of North Carolina, southern Virginia and eastern Tennessee. Later, we were able to see places further away. In 1984, the Methodists celebrated a bicentennial with a pilgrimage planned to the Methodist conference center in Georgia where John Wesley had spent a year on American soil. Leon and I joined the four-day bus trip. We left home on a cold Monday in late March.

What I remember most, after 30 years, is the drive into Spring. We saw the buds swell, the

tiny leaves erupt in all their natural color like a miniature autumn. Soon, there were green and growing flowers; daffodils, pear trees, dogwoods, azaleas, tulips dotted the landscape. Carolina Jasmine draped fence posts and shrubs; redbuds and crabapples appeared. By the time we reached Georgia, wisteria was covering the roadside trees with curtains of purple. To see all this in one day was a magnificent expression of God's glory.

The other thing I remember was the rain. It rained on Tuesday and Wednesday, with tornadoes on Wednesday night. We toured through the rain and we did learn much about Wesley. His year in America could not be called a success. In fact, he slipped away in the dead of the night and returned to England.

I was 60 when I first traveled by plane. I loved it. I have now set foot in 47 states, half of Central America, Mexico and a lot of Canada. Hopefully a 48th state – Idaho – will be added this fall. I have lived alone since Leon died ten years ago. My family is close by. I have five children, five in-laws, five grandchildren, two grand in-laws and one great grandchild.

Books still keep me company and I have friends and family to travel with and my church to sustain me. Life is good.



I Do Matter

by Ellie Martin

"Hurry, hurry! Catch up with the boats. I bet mine will beat yours," I said. "Don't fall in the water."

Once again, I had snuck away from Grandma to play with my cousins, uncles and brother. I was 8 years old and my brother and I were spending a week in Roxboro with Grandma during our summer vacation. Grandma didn't think much of girls and boys playing together. That's why I usually wound up putting apple or peach slices on the tin roof of the wood shed so they could dry while my brother got to race twig sailboats in the creek or play baseball. This was just one example of why I wanted to be a boy. Life was not fair! Sometimes I felt like I just didn't matter.

I would enjoy myself more when I got back to Papa and Grandma's house. They had a farm in Nelson, Virginia and I spent every summer with them from the age of 7 to 15. I loved it there. They had no television, no running water, and no inside bathroom, but to me it was wonderful. When Grandma didn't need me to wash dishes, help draw water to wash clothes or work in the garden, I was free to do whatever I wanted to do. You could find me standing on the back of an old



Farmall tractor, hanging on for dear life, while my uncle plowed a field or maybe feeding the horses, getting the milk cows up for the night, or checking on the tobacco barns with Papa. At night, we would all sit on the big front porch, shelling butterbeans while Papa told ghost stories or stories about his youth. To a young city girl, it was pure heaven.

I was raised in Portsmouth, Virginia along with one older brother and two younger sisters. My younger years growing up weren't great, but now looking back, I can honestly say they weren't the worst either. Mama always made sure we had clothes to wear and food to eat. We never went anywhere that the city bus couldn't take us. We just lived life in our own neighborhood.

I remember Mama and Daddy didn't go to church, but whenever I stayed with my grandparents on the farm, we went to church every Sunday. I must have enjoyed those Sundays because I started looking around my neighborhood for a place to go to church. I had three choices. In front of us, one block down, was a Holiness church. (You could hear the foot-stomping, hand-clapping and shouting all the way to our house.) Beside our house, across the street, was a Methodist church and behind us was a Seventh Day Adventist church. I guess the choice was easy for my young mind. I didn't understand about all the shouting and I didn't know why they went to church on Saturday at the church behind us. That left the Methodist church. I went there until I graduated from high school and moved to Fayetteville with my husband who was stationed at Ft. Bragg.

Yes, I was a child bride. Later, my husband was sent to Vietnam for a year and I moved back to Portsmouth with a baby less than a year old and another on the way. I moved in with my parents for six months and then lived with my in-laws for six months after my second daughter was born.

Growing up we didn't have a car so I never learned how to drive. Here I was with two small children, both in-laws at work each day and no driver's license. What if something were to happen to one of the girls? My husband's car was parked in the driveway just waiting for me. It was a fire-engine red Super Sport Chevelle with four-in-the-floor. Not exactly the best vehicle to learn how

to drive, but I did it. Up and down, up and down the driveway, until I conquered that clutch and gearshift. I got my license and my whole world changed. I could take my girls to visit their grandparents or go to Virginia Beach. I even enrolled in an exercise class and at night, I took a sewing class at the school I graduated from. I started making dresses for my girls and myself. I was becoming more independent.

My husband came home and back to Ft. Bragg we went. After two years stateside, he was sent back to Vietnam for another year. My girls and I moved back to Portsmouth and settled into a home of our own. Being able to drive made this year of separation a lot easier. My husband came back from this tour of duty and I became pregnant with our son. All seemed right with my world, but I got fooled. When my son was 2 years old, my husband decided he no longer wanted to be a part of our lives. We separated and he took us to the farm in Nelson and left us there. I had come full circle.

There I was with three children, no husband, and no job. My grandparents had both passed away and my uncle ran the farm. He let us live there for one year. He gave me an acre of tobacco to sell so I could get the money for a divorce. In order to earn my one acre, I had to work through his acres of tobacco. That summer was tough, full of topping, suckering, worming, and priming tobacco. But I did it and I got my divorce.

I was able to rent a house near the farm and I was hired as a reading aide in an elementary school close by. I did this for three years and life was good.

My children and I moved to Murfreesboro to be closer to their grandparents. I found a job as a teacher's assistant in a local elementary school in Northampton County and married the love of my life all in the same year. I worked in the same school for 34 years and I've been married almost 38 years. My husband and I have attended Severn United Methodist Church for almost 38 years. We have three children, six grandchildren, and one great grandchild. God has truly blessed our lives.

I have always thought my life was dull and ordinary until I read over what I had written here. I am a strong, independent woman. I have friends, family, children and a husband who loves me and guess what ... I do matter!



“I have always thought my life was dull and ordinary until I read over what I had written here. I am a strong, independent woman.”

Being A Missionary Kid To Becoming A Pastor's Kid

by Catherine Stallsmith

When I was 2 years old, my parents finished their missionary training and moved my twin sister and me from Dallas, Texas to a country called the Philippines. Contrary to my expression in the picture above, I loved living in the Philippines. My entire childhood, as I remember it, happened there. My little sister was born there. Dad helped indigenous tribes write worship songs in their native languages. For most of my childhood, we lived eight hours outside of the capital in a neighborhood with other MKs (missionary kids). All I knew was that I loved school, church, my family, and barefoot shenanigans with my friends. We had visited America a few times to visit family and raise support, but I liked being where I was.

When I was 9, we moved to Manila (the capital city) and I attended a private Christian school for MKs where my mom taught elementary music. I spent three years becoming familiar with everyone and it was in 7th grade when I started to really read and discover the wonder that is God's

word, spending time every morning in prayer. Every day, I brought a Bible verse I had read that morning to my Bible class and told them how it had blessed me that day. I went to a weekly after school worship club with my best friends and we all supported each other in our faith. I loved my school and my friends. In fact, I hated being home because it meant I wasn't at school.

In September 2012, my parents took my sisters and me out to lunch at a pizza place and told us that we were moving back to America after we finished the current school year. I felt like my heart had literally been ripped out of my chest. The first people that I thought of were my two best friends. How was I to break our bond and move across the ocean? We would have to leave behind everything we ever knew. My father explained to us that he felt called to be a pastor, that he would be applying to Duke Divinity School, and if he got accepted, we would be living in North Carolina.



My first question was why. Why did God do this to me? Why now? Why me? My life was going so well. My school was amazing. I did not want to start over. I did not want to go to public school and make new friends. I did not want to get different pets and neighbors and live in a parsonage. I was mad at God for the longest time, keeping my mind only a little bit open because Dad was working for Him, after all. Still, I saw my father as selfish for moving all of us away from our home because **he** wanted to go back to school.

The months flew by far too fast as we struggled to pack our most precious belongings into ten duffel bags. We sold our furniture, our car, our pets, our house. Dad got accepted to Duke; we found out we would be living in a tiny town called Oxford, and learned the names of our two

churches we would be serving. Finally, the day arrived and I was sitting on the floor of my empty bedroom where my bed used to be. All the posters of Taylor Swift and advertisements of school plays I had been in were stripped from the walls.

"I love you Cat!"

"I'll never forget you!"

I had been reading letters that my friends gave me. It was one of the last days of school and everyone had exchanged letters with those who were leaving that year. It was very common for people to come and go at our school, and I knew I would eventually be out of sight and out of mind. My eyes welled with tears as I read their letters. My dad walked in and saw me crying.

"I know it doesn't make sense right now" he told me, "but you can't blame us. Please just don't be mad at us."

I tried to remove the bitterness from my heart, but it was still there as we said impossible good-byes, boarded the plane, and flew for twelve hours across the Pacific. We landed in Georgia and were greeted by my grandparents, who helped us move to North Carolina about a month later.

Once we were finally settled into Oxford, I joined the youth group at Oxford UMC and my sisters and I were instantly welcomed and surrounded



**"Why did God do this to me? Why now?
Why me? My life was going so well."**

by God's goodness. We did a lot of service in the community and I got to see the smiling faces of people who appreciated the love we were showing them. This year, I got to go on a conference youth trip to New York City to see God working through current events. On Easter, we baptized a new member into our small membership church. I continue to stay in contact with friends I made last summer at conference events and we meet up as much as possible.

"For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11

God taught me through this whole experience that I needed to trust him and that I wasn't in control of my life. I needed to trust what his will had planned, not what I had planned. Just when you think things are going great, God can sweep the rug out from under your feet and put you on a completely different path that might not be what you think you need. To this day, I struggle to find my purpose, but I have been so uplifted by the people of Oxford and the people of the NCCUMC. Being a PK (preacher's kid) has changed my outlook on life and I am so grateful that God has put me where I am today.

Nurtured in a farm family and a rural church, I celebrate the everyday grace flowing through women – my mother, my sister, my grandmothers, and women in my church and school and community who were teachers and mentors. With a kindred spirit of thanksgiving, receive Every Day Grace – read, remember – and be inspired.



Bishop Hope Morgan Ward

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