

John Irvin Morgan; Lending a Helping Hand



Helping others is one of the greatest gifts in life a person can do, and John Irvin Morgan is a prime example of this. His generosity, dedication and contribution to the Mental Health Association, The Operation Santa Claus, and many other organizations, shows that one person can make a difference in the life of others.

John Irvin Morgan was born on July 11, 1923 in Washington North Carolina. His parents are the late, John Lucas Morgan and Katherine Stowe Havcheub of the Outer Banks. John also has a younger brother, Richard Bailey Morgan.

At the age of nine, John was selling The Washington Daily News on the streets of Washington, for three cents a copy, but every summer, John would visit his maternal grandparents (John Irvin and Janette Stowe) in Hatteras.

John loved to go fishing and climbing with his grandparents. He enjoyed hanging around

the waterfront, swimming at the Vandemere and Norfolk Southern Trestles, camping out on the bluffs and overlooking Blount's Bay. John says, "Those were my happiest times as a kid, because the sound of the ocean was very peaceful and pleasant."

John's grandfather, Capt. Irv Stowe, was the captain of a supply boat that ran from Hatteras to Elizabeth City, once a week, with cargo. The cargo consisted of boxes of iced down fish, lumber and hardware. Travel to and from the Outer Banks was by water, because of being isolated from the mainland by Oregon Inlet, to the North Hatteras Inlet to the South Pamlico sound on the west and the Atlantic Ocean on the East.

John remembers when it would take two days to get from Washington NC to Hatteras. He says "There were no roads leading to Hatteras." "You had to drive through the beach sand; there were no wall to wall cottages back then. "You would have to go to Kill Devil Hills to get to Nags Head, and then drive down the beach and catch the Four Cart Ferry in Barcelona operated by Toby Tillett." "You would spend half a day in Manteo, and then drive over to Oregon, where there was the junction and then the rest of the way, the access was by boat." Water transportation played an important role in the area. There were two boats that would come into and out of the areas, such as Elizabeth City to Washington and Oracoke to Washington. John says "Water was important contact with trade and commerce in the area, and there were logs cut along the river. John stopped spending summers in Hatteras, in 1938, due to an automobile accident at the age of fifteen, from spending a week at Boy Scout Camp. Charles, near Bailey North Carolina

John says, "They had just dropped off Warren "Big-time" Whichard at his grandmother's home in Grimes land. Lee Whealton was driving. Jimmy Nunnelee had accompanied Lee on the trip up to Bailey. Melvin Wheal ton, Lees brother was in the back seat with me. We headed out on Grimes land in this 1937 Plymouth turret top sedan coming toward Washington, when we pulled up behind two automobiles going at a slower rate of speed. Seeing the way ahead was clear, Lee accelerated to pass, when suddenly the car just ahead of us pulled out to pass the lead car, forcing us to shoulder off the road. John was told later, that the car had spun out of control, careened down to the right shoulder of the road, jumped a ditch and turned over four times in the field.

John was admitted to Tayloe's Hospital in Washington, where he regained consciousness. John's right leg was suspended from a frame around the bed, with a shell pin through the knee and ten pound weights attached to ropes from the pin extending over the end of the bed. John also has a dislocation of the first and second cervical vertebrae. Sand bags were placed on either side of his head. John was told to stay still and not move. He spent six weeks in the Hospital,

and then later returned home with a cast placed on his leg. John says, "Walking casts were not in use at that time, so I was bedridden for the next six weeks, until the cast came off.

In November of 1939, he was at recess; he and a friend were tussling. His friend picked him up and threw him down on the ground. John says, "The impact shook his entire spinal column. He adds, "It felt like a million pins and needles pricking my skin." John returned back to Tayloe's Hospital. The Doctor made arrangements for John to go to Duke Hospital in Durham.

John stayed in Duke Hospital for two weeks, he returned home with his neck placed in a leather collar that he wore for six weeks. John returned to High school and graduated in from Washington High School in May of 1941, he was poor, but worked to go to college. John got a job on campus to help pay for school along with help from the State Rehabilitation Commission, because of his physical disability.

John worked at the Book Exchange Soda Frontier, for thirty cents an hour. He also ran messages for Mrs. Mable Mallette, from Dean R.B. House's office in the south building. John also worked during meal times in the cafeteria on Franklin Street. In the spring John would see class rings and graduation invitations, representing the L.G. Balfour Company. He received commissions on his sales.

On December 7, 1941, John was working at the Book Exchange, when all of a sudden a crowd gathered to hear President Roosevelt making plans to enlist in the armed services. John enlisted, but was placed on the Four- F by a local draft board. John went to Raleigh to try to enlist in the Navy v-12 program, which allowed students to remain on campus, while getting their military training. John was rejected due to his injury. While still in school, John began working fulltime at odd jobs and going to school on the side. He was asked by Dean Dudley De Witt Carroll to go home, get a job, save money and come back, to apply for readmission, because he was flunking out.

John returned home and got a job working at the WRRF Radio station in Washington. He was an Announcer/Program Director/ Handy Man for two years. Shortly after, John was offered, and accepted a Sports Editor position at the Washington Daily News. From 1951-1964, John really enjoyed his job because he has a love for sports, whether basketball, football, baseball, you name it, but his favorite team is the UNC Tar heels. In 1965, John was elected to the Beaufort County Register of Deeds office. He was familiar with the position, because his father had worked there in the 1920's and 1930's. John worked there for seven four year terms doing administrative work.. He retired in 1992, but his retirement has not stopped him from working. John began to do Volunteer Work for a number of organizations, such as The Beaufort County

Mental Health Association.

John was inspired by his wife Geneva, an already active advocate for the Mental Health Association (MHA). He wanted to volunteer on the behalf of the mentally ill, disabled, and substance abuse patients. John became president of the Mental Health Association; he says “I want to be a spokesperson for the disabled people who cannot speak for themselves.” John handled all of the administrative work, such as arranging meetings with board members, handling bills, phone answering and etc. John and his wife Geneva’s mission is to promote mental health awareness, provide mental health education and improve the care and the treatment of the mentally ill. John also became a Volunteer Advocacy for the very popular Operation Santa Claus.

Operation Santa Claus is an organization that helps families and people, who are less fortunate to have a Merry Christmas. The organization is provided with a needs and a wants list from the families, and then people go out and buy the goods from the lists, and donate them to the Operation Santa Claus set up areas, throughout North Carolina. The representatives of the Operation Santa Claus distribute the goods among the people who need it, just in time for Christmas. The Operation Santa Claus serves clients at Cherry Hospital in Goldsboro, The Caswell Center in Kinston, The Group Homes in Beaufort County, The Behavioral Center in Beaufort County Hospital, and the Beaufort County Developmental Center. John says, “We were able to reach 2,000 people.”

John is also a volunteer for the Beaufort County Developmental Center, for the physically and mentally handicapped patients. John also handles all of the administrative work, there were no paid personnel and the funding from The United Way went to the benefit of the patients. John was also a volunteer for The Salvation Army Advisory Board, The Ascera Hospice Board and The Washington Housing Advisory Board.

John was the Chairman and Secretary; he provided the meetings and met with other Officers pertaining to helping people in any way possible. When John is not volunteering, he is spending time with his family and church.

John has been married for 56 years to his wife and best friend in the world Geneva. Geneva is a retired Pediatric Nurse and also an advocate for the Mental Health Association. They have two sons, John Morgan Jr. and Richard T Morgan. John says “Family is very important to me.” John attends The United Methodist Church in Washington, NC. He says “Church is very important; it is a spiritual connection for living a good life.” John, Geneva and their two sons get

together on Sundays after church for dinner. John also likes to work in the yard at home and watch sports on television. John's most memorable and happiest days of his life, when he was a young boy, was the summers he spent with his maternal grandparents in Hatteras. Those times inspired John to write and publish a memoir entitled *A Pleasant Gale on My Lee*. His memoir also talks about the many changes that have taken place in North Carolina since he was just a young boy.

John was nine years old, when he started spending summers in Hatteras with his maternal grandparents, John Irvin and Janette Stowe. He loved to go fishing and climbing. He enjoyed swinging outside because he said "the sound of the ocean was very peaceful and pleasant." John remembers when it would take two days to get from Washington NC to Hatteress. He says "There were no roads leading to Hatteress." "You had to drive through the beach sand; there were no wall to wall cottages back then. "You would have to go to Kill Devil Hills to get to Nags Head, and then drive down the beach and catch the Four Cart Ferry in Barcelona operated by Toby Tillett." "You would spend half a day in Manteo, and then drive over to Oregon, where there was the junction and then the rest of the way, the access was by boat." Water transportation played an important role in the area. There were two boats that would come into and out of the areas, such as Elizabeth City to Washington and Oracoke to Washington. John says "Water was important contact with trade and commerce in the area, and there were logs cut along the river.

John recalls the days when just dialing a telephone number was a process, when agriculture was a highly intensive job and when there were no computers.

John says that back in the 1920's, there was The Carolina Telegraph Telegraph. The way it worked, was you would call a number, the operator would plug you in and give you a number, example, a three digit number followed by a letter, then the operator would plug you to whomever you were calling and if the line was busy, then you would have to repeat this process again later.

The adding machine was a more practical means of technology back then, as oppose to the present day computers. John says, "That you had to compute in your head, to determine how much change to give back to a person." "Now you have a machine (cash register) that does everything for you.

John says that the agriculture here in North Carolina was very rural and tobacco was the major crop and it was long manual labor.

There was not much transportation then. There were a lot of unpaved dirt roads, and if you could afford a vehicle, your choice was a mule, house cart and later a pick up truck.

Nowadays you have massive transportation.

John remembers that in the 1950's North Carolina Governor Kerr Scott started a program to rebuild North Carolina by paving the roads. He wanted to have farm to market Roads. John says, "This was a huge noticeable change, to see the rural roads being paved and having a farm to market economy." All of this and more stories about the history of the Pamlico area and the Outer Banks can be found in John's memoir.

John is a self-publisher, the book proceeds earned \$14,000 and the funding went to The Beaufort County Mental Health Association. John also has a Memorial Fund established.

The Memorial Fund is a not for profit organization in honor of people who have past away, in which Hospice has served. The patients choose to make memorials. John is a member of The Advisory Board for the Oncology Mentally Ill Unit at East Carolina University Medical School. He handles any requests that have to do with the mentally ill. He also has a Nursing Scholarship available at East Carolina on behalf of his wife Geneva, a retired Pediatric Nurse.

John's wife of 56 ½ years says, "John is a really great guy." "He is very active in his work and church." "He is very easygoing and never says an unkind word.

John's longtime friend of 43 years Betty Ferrell says, "John has one of the best personalities that I know of." "John is a wonderful man and very supportive in everything that he does." "He is always willing to help others." "He is very laid back. He loves people and sees the best in everybody. John has received awards for the Operation Santa Claus, and when Christmas is over, He starts working on the next one.

Betty, also has read John's book and she says, "John's book is very interesting, you learn a lot about the Coastal area and how he lived, through his eyes." "John is a great storyteller, he can make anything interesting." "He can tell facts in a way in which you can enjoy it." "John and his wife Geneva are just wonderful people." "Every age group just loves them both." "I don't know anyone who has done anything more to help people than the two of them and they each do it with love and compassion." "I am very fortunate to have a relationship with them over the years." Betty Ferrell's grandchild is named Mary Morgan in relation to John.

John Irvin Morgan is definitely an example of someone who helps others for the better.

When I first met John for the interview, I was a little nervous, but his presence, handshake and smile made me feel very relaxed. John has made me laugh several times during the interview. He is very easygoing and full of memories, as if the events occurred yesterday.



John Irvin Morgan and Christine Somerville