

Ira and Lizzie Holloway: A Lifetime together



Nestled back in Sladesville North Carolina lives a beautiful couple named Ira and Lizzie Holloway. It's hard to imagine that they are both in their nineties. Sitting side by side in matching recliners, they remind me of young teenagers enjoying each other's company except Uncle Ira, who has Alzheimer's, is dozing off without a care in the world. As Aunt Lizzie begins to tell her story, her eyes light up as she begins to recall her days of growing up with Uncle Ira and raising their family.



Aunt Lizzie was born on November 8, 1914 to the late Hezekiah ("Papa") and Martha Silverthorne in Sladesville North Carolina. They owned their farm in which they raised vegetables, cows, cotton, pigs and chickens. Uncle Ira was born November 29, 1910 to the late Ira Sr. and Hegggar Holloway in Sladesville who were farmers also. Aunt Lizzie had three brothers and one sister who died at the age of twelve.

She begins when they were five or six years old playing on the same road of which they still reside. "He lived a couple of houses away from me, and we would get with the other kids who lived on the road and played stick ball, hop-scotch, hide and seek, and marbles" she says.

“I was a pretty good child growing up” she says with a smile. Aunt Lizzie attended the all black Hyde County Training School in Sladesville, North Carolina which housed grades one through eleven. During that time, there was one teacher for each grade level. As she sits and strokes her silver crown of hair, positions her gold-rim glasses on her nose, she recalls the days when she walked three miles to and from school. “You know back then we didn’t have cars, so we had to walk.” Everyday she wore a denim cloth book-bag made by her mother around her neck and shoulders that had pockets on each side to put her books. Aunt Lizzie hesitates and says “back then the winters were colder than what they are now.” “I almost froze my behind off walking back and forth to school with all those books.” “Papa was able to buy us coats and rubber boots to wear during the cold winters.” “We didn’t have gloves back then, so my hands were like ice, and I was frozen stiff by the time I got to school” she says shaking her head in disbelief. Once she arrived to school, everyone would cuddle around the cast iron wood heater trying to warm up. Eventually, everyone would warm-up by lunchtime only to face the harsh, cold three mile walk home later.

Growing up for Aunt Lizzie, at times, meant having to stop going to school to help her parents on their farm. They didn’t have hired help to work the fields, so they became the hired help. She brags “I was a good child, never gave anyone any trouble.” “You did what you were told or you’d get a whippin’ and I didn’t want no whippin.” After they finished planting the fields, she and her siblings returned to school. When it came time to pick the corn and tobacco, Aunt Lizzie and her siblings had to work the field sometimes causing them to miss the first month or so of school.

She begins to smile and laughs softly, as she remembers her pretty little tin lunch pail that her papa bought her. “Most of the children back then brought their lunch in a paper bags. I was the only one who had a tin lunch pail. “I loved my little lunch pail” that is until a boy named Denis came along. “He use to pick at me somethin’ terrible” until one day she got tired of it and she started “beatin’ him across his head with my pail, I ht’em so many times until I broke it.” Dennis began teasing her by saying “Miss Lady you’ll car’y it now in a paper bag” she says as she bursts out in a loud soft laugh. “I really loved my lunch pail.”

After walking three miles home from school, she and her siblings didn’t start their

homework instead headed into the fields with their burlap bags to harvest the corn and cotton with their papa.

After she graduated at the young age of eighteen, Aunt Lizzie and Uncle Ira got married during what she calls Hoover times (hard times) on December 12, 1931. The following school year Hyde County added the twelfth grade to the school calendar, but she says “I did not go back because I was married by then.” At the beginning of their marriage, she and Uncle Ira worked twelve hour days chopping mile-long rows of cotton and corn for \$.50 a day for a local farmer. As many couples did during those days, Aunt Lizzie eventually had to stay home to take care of her daughter Margie. A year later she had another daughter Ida. Times were hard “we had a small garden of vegetables, so I did a lot of canning of okra, tomatoes, corn, peaches and apples for the winter months.” When the girls got older, they were able to help with the canning. There were times when the weather destroyed their crops and Uncle Ira couldn’t farm. In order to provide for his family, he took a job working for the state chopping weeds on the sides of the roads. After many years of hard labor on and off the fields, Uncle Ira was able to have his own plot of farmland. Aunt Lizzie recalls how she and the girls (who were up in size by then) each had a mule and wooden plow to work the rows. Aunt Lizzie had to scoop out the drains that ran along the fields and keep up with the girls. “I worked hard back then that’s probably why I have problems with my back all that bending and scooping.” She brags with a wide smile across her face of how good her girls handled those mules. She says “they never gave me a bit of trouble when it came to working in them fields. They worked and plowed the fields like they were men.” Ida and Margie always told Aunt Lizzie they worked enough to retire before they left home which she would always laugh.

There was a time when Aunt Lizzie had to get the faithful whip and “whoop them good fashion.” Aunt Lizzie expresses how Ina (the baby girl) was always the pickin’ one. One afternoon she had popped some corn on the wood stove, when Ina and Margie started fighting over it. They fought so hard that Margie tore Ina’s shirt, so Aunt Ida had to bring out the faithful elm whip and tear ‘em up! Ina being the baby thought she could get away with a lot of her picking. She often threatened to tell her daddy. Aunt Lizzie always countered by welcoming the challenge knowing Uncle Ira wouldn’t dare step in. “I didn’t have to discipline them often.” “They were good kids not like the kids today.”

“Kids today are not like we were growing up.” “You didn’t talk back to the grown folks back then or you’d get a whoopin.” “If any other family adults learned of your bad behavior, you’d get another whooping from them.” “Today parents let their children do what they want instead of what the bible teaches of “spare the rod, spoil the child.”

As her girls were growing up, they rarely became sick and when they were she would give them Creomulsion cough syrup, rub them down with alcohol for fevers or make sassafras tea. This tea was a common anecdote to what ailed you at that time. She would pick the leaves from the plants that grew along their ditch bank and boil them into tea for the girls to drink. Once her girls became adults, Aunt Lizzie started her career cleaning crabs during the season for Clarence Jeanette Crab House in 1951 in Sladesville until it closed, she then went to Blue Channel Crab House in Belhaven for nine years and returned to the oyster house in Germantown (now Rose Bay Oyster) where she worked from 1976 to 1987 because it was closer to home. She was 73 years old when she stopped working. Aunt Lizzie remembers working in the cold oyster house which had a small wood stove for heat. However, the owners used bad wood which made heat nonexistent. The crab house was so cold that she ended up with frostbite to her feet. She couldn’t wear her regular shoes for over a week Uncle Ira started working at the local saw mill for \$0.75 a day “that was good money back then” she states. He worked at the saw mill, raised vegetables, cows and hogs of which he sold to make money in order to build the house in which they still live. The man who built the house was paid \$0.75 an hour and Aunt Lizzie’s father furnished the timber from his land. The local lumber mill charged \$0.55 an hour to cut and smooth the timber. Uncle Ira and Aunt Lizzie moved into their new home on December 12, 1950 when their daughter Ida went off college. They did not have electricity for their new home until 1952 after saving money from working in the tobacco fields or running water until 1965. Washing clothes entailed two big wash tubs and a washboard and a lot of pumping water from the pump out by the well. “I use to scrub so hard till I’d scrub a hole in the piece I was washin” she says. “We didn’t have a refrigerator back then, so we had to buy blocks of ice from the ice man which costs \$0.25 to \$0.50 a piece.” “That was some of the prettiest ice I’d ever seen, it was crystal clear, just pretty.” She remembers how the ice man would take the ice to the house for his white customers and his black customers he would make them

walk to the road and get it. She really didn't care for him too much. She then explains how they used a wooden-icebox to place the block ice and keep their milk, meat and eggs from spoiling.

Aunt Lizzie is still doing her own cooking. She informed me that she made eight homemade fruitcakes this past December. "I love to cook, but I don't cook like I use too" she says. My mother-in-law Alice (who is Aunt Lizzie's niece) says "I wish I knew you made fruitcakes I would've got you to make me one." Aunt Lizzie tells her "if you buy the stuff and come down here I'll walk you through making one." Alice gladly accepts the invitation with anticipation of enjoying her future fruitcake. Do you make the all famous poon-bread (molasses bread) I asked? Regretfully, she told me no because she didn't care for it.



St. John Missionary Baptist Church, Sladesville North Carolina

Aunt Lizzie and Uncle Ira are members of St. John Missionary Baptist Church in Scranton, North Carolina. She joined church at an early age. "I was baptized in the Pamlico Sound in Germantown North Carolina about two miles from here" as she points in the direction of the Sound. She has been a devoted member for over eighty years. During her early years she was a member of the usher board and later became a mother of the church. A position she still holds. On May 14, 2006, she was awarded an appreciation plaque for more than eighty years of dedicated service at St John Missionary Baptist Church.

As I begin to end my conversation with Uncle Ira and Aunt Lizzie, she tells me that young people don't realize how blessed they are today. We (young people) don't have a clue of the hard times we endured to make it from day to day. She's right we don't appreciate our elderly as we should.



Uncle Ira and Aunt Lizzie have been a part of each other's lives for over 75 years. As faith would have it, Uncle Ira died unexpectedly on February 1, 2007 he was 96 years young. Aunt Lizzie now sits in Uncle Ira's recliner missing her friend of a lifetime.