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The Intriguing Life of Nora Grey Foster Braddy



Stephanie Braddy, Renae Braddy, Nora Braddy, James Braddy, Jessica Kirk; (Snook in back)

Along the Pamlico River that runs into the Pamlico Sound and out into the Atlantic Ocean, a small, light blue house still stands and is where my grandmother, Nora Grey Foster, was born. It's a time when the shorelines were sandy, the water was crystal clear, home-cooked meals were plentiful, farming was popular, and people worked hard for a living. But this is just the beginning of her life.

Early Years

Nora Foster, who prefers to be called Granny rather than grandmother, was born on September 21, 1924, to Ruth and Samuel Foster who lived by the river at Pamlico Beach. She was their second child.



The house that she grew up in only had one room to begin with. It came from North Creek and was put together with pegs. Her daddy added three small bedrooms onto the house by the time she was seventeen. There was

no running water, no inside plumbing, and no lights.

They had to work hard every day from the fields to the river. She worked by chopping corn, picking potatoes, cotton, and tobacco for “a very, very low price per hour.” Not only did she work in the fields, but sometimes she would go into the woods to pick blueberries and briar berries. “We lived out of the garden and river. We ate fish, oysters, crabs, collards, and everything that goes into a garden.”

Granny and her sister, Sadie, also crabbed. The two sisters would go out in a boat, which their daddy provided, armed only with a crab line and dipper for scooping the crabs up and into barrels. Not only would they crab out in the boat, but they also waded out along the beach and caught soft crabs. Since the water was clear, they could see the crabs swimming along and just pick them up.

During these years she attended school for ten and a half years at the local schoolhouse. “It only had three rooms and...they would pull the slides [which] would separate [them]. We had four or five grades in one room.” She attended high school in

Belhaven, which was considered to be quite a distance away from home back then.

There was a school bus that would pick her up down the road so she didn't have to walk all the way to school. Although she loved school and enjoyed learning, she wasn't able to graduate because she was needed at home to take care of her younger siblings which involved ironing, washing, and cooking.

She and Sadie would not only wash clothes for the family at home, but also for other people. Granny started, "We didn't have a washer; we had a scrub board. We had to do [most of our] washing outside. We didn't have inside plumbing or lights. We had to get our water from the spring that was up by the cemetery up there. It was running all the time and it was pure water. We had to go up there with tubs. No matter how cold, we went and filled those tubs up. And if it got rough then we'd lose half of it before we got home and so we'd have to make another trip." She chuckles.

Back then, her momma used to make clothes out of flour sacks. "She sewed them together and that's what we had when we were growing up." She would also sew blankets, make dolls, and all sorts of neat items. Granny only remembers her daddy buying shoes for all the kids. They would line up at the shoe store and each would get a pair for that year.



While she was growing up, playtime consisted of swimming, sewing, and building castles on the beach. They would also head down to Belhaven sometimes on the boat to visit the marina that is

no longer there. “They didn’t have any sidewalks like today. Instead it was boards and the streets were dirt.” Not only that, but she enjoyed helping her mother take care of the luscious rose garden near the Pamlico River and loved spending time with her grandmother – Mary Greaves.

She even started cooking outside on an old stove that her momma had thrown out. The first meal she cooked was fish and cornbread and this profession helped her provide for her future family and even the neighborhood.

Good Ol’ Home Cooking

Cooking is perhaps what people remember the best about my Granny. She would cook breakfast, pack lunches for her children (if they didn’t want to eat in the cafeteria), and have dinner on the table by 5 o’clock. Sometimes her sisters would bring their families over to eat her tasty meals. But her siblings’ families weren’t the only visitors to her home when she lived in Belhaven. “[The kids] in the neighborhood knew when I was going to have supper and showed up.” She welcomed the children into her home and fed them as long as they washed their hands and behaved.

She still continues to cook today although she tends to fix only one meal a day. Perhaps her most famous meal among the family includes juicy collards, dumplings, cornbread, potatoes, and a small serving of meat. Every now and then she’ll cook it and invite her children and grandchildren over for dinner. She also cooks collards for the Foster family reunion, but if you’re not there early, you’ll miss out because they go fast.

Not only would she cook, but she would also can about 600-800 quarts a year from the various fruits and vegetables that would come from the garden. She no longer does any canning, but when she fixed jam (grape, strawberry, pear, blueberry, and figs

are among the most well-known) it was always enjoyed by not only herself, but her children's families. She would make sure that each family got a sufficient amount of her home-made jams.

Singing and Church

When Sadie and Granny worked in Washington they continued to follow their singing which had originally started when they were younger and were singing at church with the choir. This time, however, they were on the radio at 10A.M. every Sunday morning before church. The radio station they sang at was WRRF in Washington, NC. The



pair would also sing in churches and even sang with Bill Monroe (and if you don't know who he is, he's known as the Father of Bluegrass). "We had an audience. It's nothing



like today, but we had [one]. We did that for a while until Sadie up and got married."

Granny not only sang in church, but after she was married, she made sure everyone in her family went to church on Sundays. She would set out their clean

church clothes for that day and they weren't allowed to get them dirty. She also was a Sunday school teacher, which was something that she enjoyed doing.

Work

Granny left home around the age of 17 and worked in Washington with her sister as a waitress at Brown's Cafeteria and a small coffee shop. When she married and started a family, she moved to Belhaven and worked at a sewing factory for 6 years. The sewing factory was located across from where Wachovia bank is now. She was offered a job as supervisor at another sewing factory in Washington because of how well and fast she sewed. She declined because it was far from home and she didn't want to relocate or move away from her family.

While working in the sewing factory at Belhaven, the managers would list the names of people who produced the most materials (skirts, shirts, etc) for that day. "I made more than anyone in the factory and didn't like my name up there on the board. So I started sewing for another girl beside me, Nancy, and put her tags on mine instead." She would cook breakfast for the family, work while they were at school, then come home to cook dinner and do all the house chores that needed to be done.

Family Life

A few years after starting work in Washington, she married a young man by the name of James Lynwood Braddy (everyone knows him as Jim) on July 5, 1945 in the town of New Bern. "We chose that date 'cause it was when he was home and right after the 4th of July. Two witnesses were there, they were getting married too, and they signed our marriage license and we signed theirs." At the time of their marriage he was still in

service for which he had been drafted into during World War II at the age of 18. He was in the military for a couple years and they lived in a lot of places from the army station in South Carolina to Virginia.

Granny and Jim had grown up together down on Pamlico Beach. “He did the same kind of work for a living and he grew up the same way – the hard way.” She would often visit him on his parents’ farm, and he even taught her how to drive.



Patricia, Jim, Granny, (unknown girl), Wayne, Kenneth, Melvin

Their first child, Wayne, was born on September 20, 1946 followed by Melvin on March 8, 1948, Kenneth on November 18, 1950 and the last child was Patricia who was born on March 23, 1954. When Granny went into labor with Kenneth, the roads were flooded with water and it was raining. “The roads were blocked ‘cause they were going to pave them.” She and Jim had to wade through the deep water to get to McKinley Foster’s house. He was a friend of theirs and owned a jeep which could take them through the blocks and water. That’s one night that Granny remembers well.

Granny also remembers that as a family, they would go to the mountains or up to Aunt June or Aunt Celeste's house. They would also go out on the big shrimp boat whenever Jim was home (he worked on a tugboat so he was gone about every two weeks) to catch shrimp, crabs, and fish. What they caught that day would be cooked on the boat for dinner that night.

They lived in Belhaven in the area known as West End, but ended up moving to a place outside Belhaven sometime in the early 1950s. After living there for 10-15 years, they had a house built that was further inland so it wouldn't flood as much from the heavy rains and swelling that the hurricanes brought with them. The house was built in 1969 and 1970. Kenneth's graduating class of 1969 put the roof on the house, which makes him proud to have helped build his family's new home.

Around the time that the new house was being built, Melvin and Wayne were drafted into the Vietnam War. Wayne was sent to Germany and Melvin was sent to Vietnam. Kenneth attended college for two years before he was drafted into service, but he stayed as a teacher for engineering.

It wasn't very long after that Jim became sick. He was diagnosed with lung cancer which was caused by his smoking habit and passed away in 1976. It was devastating and was hard on the whole family.

In 1978, an acquaintance showed up at Granny's door. His name is Fenner Forrest Cox but everyone calls him Snook. He knew Granny was having a hard time so he offered to help pay the bills and take care of her. They've been together for about 30 years and she loves visiting his home where he has a large garden, chickens, goats, and

other various critters. Despite being together for so long, Granny hasn't married him. "Jim is the love of my life and I hope to see him one day."

Later Years

In 1998, a pot-belly pig by the name of Porky became Granny's pet to keep her company. Porky learned how to sit, stay, and she was even potty-trained. However, when Porky grew bigger, she accidentally knocked Granny over and it was decided that Porky should stay with Snook.

After that incident Granny picked out a chocolate toy poodle who she named Frisky due to his extremely large amounts of energy. She has had him for about 7 years now despite the fact that he has diabetes, allergies, and other medical problems. He is her sweetheart and she enjoys him being with her.



Her recent years haven't been all about pets, however. Whenever she gets the chance, she cooks for relatives, family reunions, and get-togethers. She also enjoys having company over and loves to talk about anything and everything. She tries to keep her house looking nice and it's definitely a comfortable spot to stay or visit. Most relatives who walk through her door find it hard to stay awake on one of her comfy couches, because when the sun is going down and her soft voice sounds like a lullaby, it's

hard not dozing off. Her house is definitely a comfortable spot and always feels like home.

Although she's home most of the time, she likes going out to eat and even cruising around the countryside with anyone who will take her. Her granddaughter, Michelle Daniels, and great granddaughter, Michaela, often visit her and occasionally take her out to eat when she's feeling well.

Daughter, Mother, and Wife



Almost every year, Granny revisits the home in which she was born to see her other siblings and their children at the annual Foster family reunion. The water is no longer clear, the beach has washed away, and no one lives in the small, light blue house along the shoreline these years. It was the starting place of a woman who lived an interesting life from

singing on the radio to working in the fields and fishing. She is quite a character and wherever she goes, people will definitely notice her and remember from the nurses at the hospital to the carpenters who replaced her roof. She is the forever beautiful and caring woman we have all come to know and love – Nora Grey Foster.