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Cultural Studies
Life on the Pamlico
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It was a beautiful, cool day when I drove down to Bath Creek to meet my Uncle Starley Stell. I was greeted at the door by my Aunt Cynthia Stell. She walked me over to the barn where my uncle was at. As I walked through the door, I could feel the heat and smell the aroma coming from the wood stove that was located left of the door. After I walked in, Starley asked me to sit, so we sat at his picnic table that was covered with a red and white tablecloth. We then began to discuss his life over the next few hours before we toured his farmland.

Boy on a Farm

Starley Lewis Stell, Jr. was born to Starley Lewis Stell, Sr. and Irene Harris Stell on April 28, 1947. He was an only child; however he had a happy childhood growing up on his family farm which was bought by his grandfather back in the 1930s. As a young boy, he enjoyed playing with the neighborhood children. Starley remembered, "I loved playing football with the other children in the area." He really enjoyed the freedom of being a kid which gave him time to enjoy life.

At the age of ten, Starley started helping his father on the farm by priming tobacco which took a lot of effort and time. Starley sometimes felt that working on the farm could be a tedious job, but as an adult it became one of his passions that he looks forward to every year. He said, "I worked this farm all my life. After my daddy got sick, I moved right into doing it (farming)." He farms as a hobby, because he has a full-time job at PCS Phosphate. He told me, "My farming is a hobby. It is something great that I can get on the tractor and get my mind off of my other job." Because Starley farms as a

hobby, he and his close friend Guy Cutler actually purchase farming equipment that the two share, because Starley said, “Neither one of us had enough land to justify buying some of the products we needed.” Surprisingly, he does all of his farming work himself which gives him a sense of accomplishment and enjoyment. In the future, he said that if either of his two sons would farm the land after he was gone it would probably be his youngest son, Steven, who is studying at NC State in the Agricultural department, but he is not sure whether or not the tradition would be carried on. However Starley will continue to farm until he is unable to continue this favorable hobby.

School Life

Starley attended Bath Public School in Bath, North Carolina. When Starley was in school, he already knew that whatever his teachers said was right. He still remembers that if he got into trouble at school and got a whipping he knew he was going to get another one as soon as he got home. Starley said, “Even as a small child, what my teachers said would be gospel to my parents. So, if I misbehaved and got into trouble at school, my parents were sure to get me when I got home.” He said that his parents knew that if he was in trouble at school that they would never question it, but they would punish him too because he needed to learn to behave and respect his elders. He realized that when his own children started in school that many parents did not take the word of the teacher, but questioned their authority when it comes to their children misbehaving. He knew that if his children were “acting up in class and got into trouble” they would be punished as well when they got home. Well he had it easy finding out whether his sons were behaving or not, because he was on the advisory board for Bath schools. By being on this board, he had firsthand access to the principal, school board, and teachers of his son’s schools, so

as a parent this worked to his advantage. He got a chance to see whether or not his children were behaving or not. He said, "I never had so much trouble with my oldest son Ley behaving, but my youngest Steven was more outgoing and would get into trouble more often." It was funny hearing him say, "Ley could not lie to anyone, so if he got a 40 on a test, he would tell me as soon as he walked in the door. Steven was different, because he would always say, 'School was fine,' whether it was or not."

During high school, Starley was a member of the Future Farmers of America (FFA). In his senior year of school, Starley became the Secretary of the FFA. Because of his work in the organization while he was in school, Starley became an honorary member of the group not only for his time in the organization, but especially after he helped Bath high school with their farming projects. Also, while in high school, he played sports like football and basketball. "I loved football. I played center on Offense and guard on Defense. Back then we did not have enough guys to make up a full offensive and defensive team. Also, my football team during my senior year of high school we went third team All-State which was great." Starley regaled of his accomplishments in high school, but he built on these accomplishments and worked his way up in life towards his next adventures in college and in the military.

Military Man

After high school, Starley decided to attend Pitt County Technical Institute. He pursued a career in Basic Electronics which was a one year degree. He said, "I loved math and really enjoyed learning more algebra while in college, because my electronics courses dealt a lot with math concepts." He thoroughly enjoyed his experience at Pitt, because the training he received there carried him on through his later work at Texasgulf

(PCS Phosphate). After he finished at Pitt, Starley was on the 1A list to be drafted to do a tour in Vietnam; however, he lucked out by quickly signing up for the Army Reserve. Starley said, "It was either I joined the Army Reserve or National Guard, or I was going to be drafted. People got drafted if they did not join or they didn't go to a 3 or 4 year school." Because Starley was placed in the Army Reserve on September 7, 1966, he did not get drafted and deployed out to tour in Vietnam. At this time, most men that did not sign up for the National Guard or get put in the Army Reserve were on an automatic trip to fight in the tragic war that was taking place in Vietnam. So, as a young man, Starley got lucky that he was never deployed, because many men during this time never came back from their tour of duty overseas.

While Starley was in the Army Reserve, he went to Georgia for formal training camp which was six months of basic training and advanced individual training (AIT). During the year, the reserve required him to work in the army camps two weeks a year and one weekend a month with four months active duty or he could be called up for accelerated drills which required him to work every other weekend. The Army Reserve assigned Starley to a position as a communication specialist. He had to set up communication lines at the reserve centers which involved setting up phone lines and radio lines. Because of working in communications, he was in fact involved in the Cage system which used Crypto (a secret code language used in military bases). Eagerly he said, "I thought this was so exciting, because to get into the buildings to do my work I had to have a secret security clearance and guards were always surrounding the buildings." He said they would send these secret codes by typing them up on the typewriter and sending the papers to the other facilities to be decoded. He really seemed

to enjoy this type of work and was so proud of the work he did while in the Army Reserve. While he was working in the Army Reserve, he also got another job that he continues to work at even now which is in the electrics department at Texasgulf (PCS Phosphate).

Texasgulf/PCS Phosphate

He began working at Texasgulf or what is now called PCS Phosphate when he was only 19 years old. He started at the bottom of the chain in the electrical department making a minimum of \$2.09 an hour (which he says was a lot of money in those days). He started working as a shift electrician helper and he worked up as a lead. He then became the head of his department over four other men. Soon after he stopped shift work, he was promoted to an electrical craftsman. During this time, he worked with lights, reciprocals, motors, transformers, and controls on interlock belts. Even though he worked in a dangerous department, Starley said that in the forty years that he has worked for Texasgulf he has never been hurt on the job. Also, in over 30 years, there have been no fatalities only a few burns or possible lost fingers. In 1977, he was promoted to working as a foreman in the mines. In 1990, he transferred from working in the mines to being a Control Equipment Specialist, but in this job he really did not have interaction with people. He mentioned, "I started to miss the interaction between people in the work area, because now I mainly worked on projects which did not involve being around many other employees."

Starley now works as a General Foreman over the mine, wheel, and bucketwheel division. He is also in charge of 35 other employees and some forms of maintenance work. Starley is in charge of a seven million dollar department each calendar year, so he

controls the money over his salaried employees, the parts needed, and travel expenses for all of his departments employees. Because he is a General Foreman, he actually gets to travel around the country to look at the electrical parts to make sure that the parts are running properly, because it will cost the company a lot less money if they can fix the parts rather than if they have to replace the parts.

Soon Starley will be retiring from PCS after 40 years working for the company. He has put many days into this corporation and he is beyond excited to finally be able to retire from the company. He said, "Because I waited out my 40 years with the company, I will get a 70% pension of my current salary, so that is why I stayed on with the job this long." For a retirement present, Starley actually went out and bought himself a new Harley. He said, "I named her "K" which stands for my 401K plan I will be getting." I got a good laugh out of that one. He was so proud to see that sleek black Harley sitting in his garage surprisingly his wife, Cynthia, even enjoys riding on it.

Family Life

Starley actually met his wife, Cynthia Ann Dail, through mutual friends down in Ernul, NC. He told me of their first date together which was actually quite funny. He said, "I went on a double-date with Gloria Forbes (his date), an Elks-boy, and Cynthia." What was funny Starley was dating Cynthia's best friend Gloria. Some time in the near future Cynthia and Starley were both single. Starley went up to his friends house Mike Cutler who convinced Starley to call Cynthia up to go on a date. Well, Starley said, "After I started dating Cynthia, I never dated anyone else." The couple dated for about two years before they finally got married. They married at Macedonia Free Will Baptist Church in September 1972. They were married in a traditional style country wedding

surrounded by their closet family and friends. After the wedding, they actually moved into a house down on Starley's family farm in Bath.

In 1975, the couple had their first son "Ley" or Starley Lewis Stell, III. Starley said that Ley was a shy, quiet child. He said, "Ley was such a good kid that even felt guilty if he did anything wrong." Ley has always been his mama's little boy. A few years later in 1982, Starley and Cynthia made a new addition to their family when they had Steven Alton Stell. Steven was an adorable blonde-haired boy; however, he could have been no more different than his brother Ley. Steven was a rambunctious child. Starley said, "Steven is so much like me." Steven was always getting into some kind of trouble. Steven was a sweet, lovable child, but he was a free-spirit. So, Starley said that Steven was always his boy, because he actually reminded him more of himself than Ley did. Steven seems to be more ambitious to work on machinery and the farm just like his father. Starley said, "When my father was sick Ley would help out by taking care of his granddad by helping his grandma in the home by bathing and cleaning up. Steven was the more subtle type in this situation, but he helped out a great deal by keeping the yard mowed and doing any outside or mechanical work they needed taking care of." I think that Starley's sons both have a little piece of him in them, because Starley is the most lovable type of man that would do anything for his fellow man, but he is also such an outgoing person. He knows how to be there for his family, but also can get down in the dirt and work on about any type of machinery imaginable. While talking about his family, he shows so much pride and love for his sons and his wife, and it is comforting to see a man that is so concerned about his family's life and well-being.

Community Man

Starley is also much involved in his community of Bath. He is a member of the Bath Christian Church in which he has been a deacon for several years. He is also a member of the Ruritan Club of Bath. In the Ruritan Club, he has served as the president and vice president of the club. He meets with the club once a month. In the club, he participates in many fundraisers to help raise money for people in need in his community like they raised around \$60,000 for a man in the community that had leukemia. Starley was also involved in the areas Tri-Centennial event that was for Bath North Carolina's 300 year old birthday. Also, it was a celebration not only because the town was 300 years old, but also because it was the oldest town located in North Carolina. Starley said, "It was an all year event. We had so many fundraisers with pig-pickings and fish-fries." He said that the fundraisers raised money for different organizations which in turn put the money back into the community by helping the elderly in the town, helped send children to camp, and many other needs that needed attention within Bath. Starley really enjoys all of the organizations that he is involved in, and they do so much to help people in need within the community.

Hunter and Fisher Man

Because Starley's home is right next to Bath Creek, he says that he really enjoys fishing down at the creek. He loves to take out his boat and go fishing so he can have a calm and relaxing day. He also loves to go hunting. He said that he hunts quail mostly which he takes his bird dog out with him to hunt with, but he also does do some deer hunting too. Starley and his friend Guy were actually hunting down on one of their other friends Eddie Smith's hunting preserve. Starley and Guy were going to lead a bird hunt for some men Eddie knew. Starley had stirred up the birds for the men to hunt, so he

decided that he was going to go up in one of the stands to see if he could kill a deer so he could make some sausage out of. Well, he gets up in the stand and sees this great big doe walk out of the woods. He said, "I couldn't get a clear shot of the doe, so I got down on my knee to set up a shot. Then I got a cramp in my leg, so I stood up to shake out the cramp and the deer started to run off. Then the deer stopped and I got a good shot in her." He then went down and got Guy to help him load the deer up, but the doe was so big that it would not even fit in the back of his truck.

The next day, Starley went hunting again with his friends and he was back up in the stand when he saw three bears come out of the woods. It was a mama bear that weighed around 250 pounds and two baby cubs that were about 100 pounds each. Starley said, "They were breaking off corn from the corn field, so I decided to take a shot at the big bear. I remembered Eddie told me that if I ever shot a bear once keep on shooting till you know it's dead, so that's what I did. I shot her once and she fell to the ground. She then lifted her head, so I shot her a second time. Then she leaned up a third time, so I popped one more off at her which finished her off." He was in shock at finally killing this bear, because that is such a hard task to do. He was so happy about killing this bear that he decided that he was going to get its head mounted on the wall. He tells his hunting stories with such excitement and the smile on his face just tells it all that he will always enjoy his hunting.

Future

Starley is not sure what the future will hold for him, but he hopes to continue with a long, memorable journey. After his retirement, he hopes to do some traveling with his

wife, Cynthia. He also will continue farming each year and doing some form of consulting work. Also, he plans to spend some more time fishing, golfing, and hunting for fun. Another exciting event that will take place soon after his retirement in April of '07, Starley and Cynthia will be new grandparents, because their son Ley and his wife Connie are expecting their first child in May of this year. Starley is so excited that he will soon be a granddaddy. Starley is so thrilled about what the future will bring him and his family after his long awaited retirement. I hope that he has the best of luck in all that he does at the present time and in the future.