

Pamlico HORIZONS

Life on the Pamlico: Telling old stories with new technology

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Shirley Jean Roberson, one of 22 children, grew up on a farm near Hamilton and each morning ate a breakfast that included biscuits, fried sausage and bacon, eggs and a jar or two of peaches before helping with the chores and heading off to school.

Her life story, which includes marriage and six children of her own, inspired her daughter, Charlotte Simpson, to learn more about her mother as part of an oral history project for a class at Beaufort County Community College.

For Kenneth Worsley, the inspiration came from family friend Henrietta

Gorham, whose childhood nickname, "Mudduck" came from her love of making mud pies for the neighborhood boys.

Worsley hopes that Gorham's perseverance following the death of her second child from heart disease can inspire today's young people.

Gorham and Roberson's stories are two of 11 oral histories that are included in the 2011 edition of Life on the Pamlico, now available for downloading on the BCCC website.

Written by BCCC students in Bryan Oesterreich's Cultural Studies class, Life on the Pamlico is a journal of oral histories drawn from coastal North Carolina residents.

Students in Oesterreich's class spent the fall

semester interviewing longtime area residents – most of whom are relatives – and wrote their stories, preserving them for generations to come.

The latest edition is a continuation of a tradition at BCCC that dates back to 1981.

Originally published in paperback, Life on the Pamlico is now published exclusively online using 21st Century technology to preserve old stories.

And while some readers may miss having a book to hold in their hands, publishing the oral histories on the Internet allows a larger number of readers and researchers to have access to the information contained in the magazine.

"When we first talked about a redesign of the

publication, we had only begun to realize the possibilities of a digital format," said James E. Casey, the magazine's designer. "It is a paradox of sorts, in that technologies, so thoroughly alien to many of the subjects here, have become such an asset in preserving these glimpses of the past."

The 2011 edition of Life on the Pamlico has been expanded to include not only photographs of the people profiled but also some of the documents – marriage records, employment records and the like – which help complete the life stories told in the magazine, Casey said.

The publication also tries to balance a modern, magazine-style layout with the vintage appearance of

a shoebox full of old photos, spread out on a kitchen table, he said.

Oesterreich said he prompts his students to use those old photos to draw out their subjects and to compile their stories through a series of interviews that focus on topics such as early years, work, entertainment.

The students not only "learn a lot more about their relative or family friend than they ever did," they also "learn to become writers," Oesterreich said.

And while some students are daunted by the challenge, the ones that see it through to the finish "end up really enjoying the experience."

Worsley, of Washington, said he was one of those who enjoyed the assign-

ment of interviewing Gorham and said he hopes today's young people can learn something from her life.

"She has endured a lot," he said. "But she didn't let it stop her from reaching what she wanted to do in life. Many people in her position would have given up. But she didn't."

He is pleased that Gorham's life story will be available for others to read and that Life on the Pamlico will inspire others to "sit down and talk to people" about their lives.

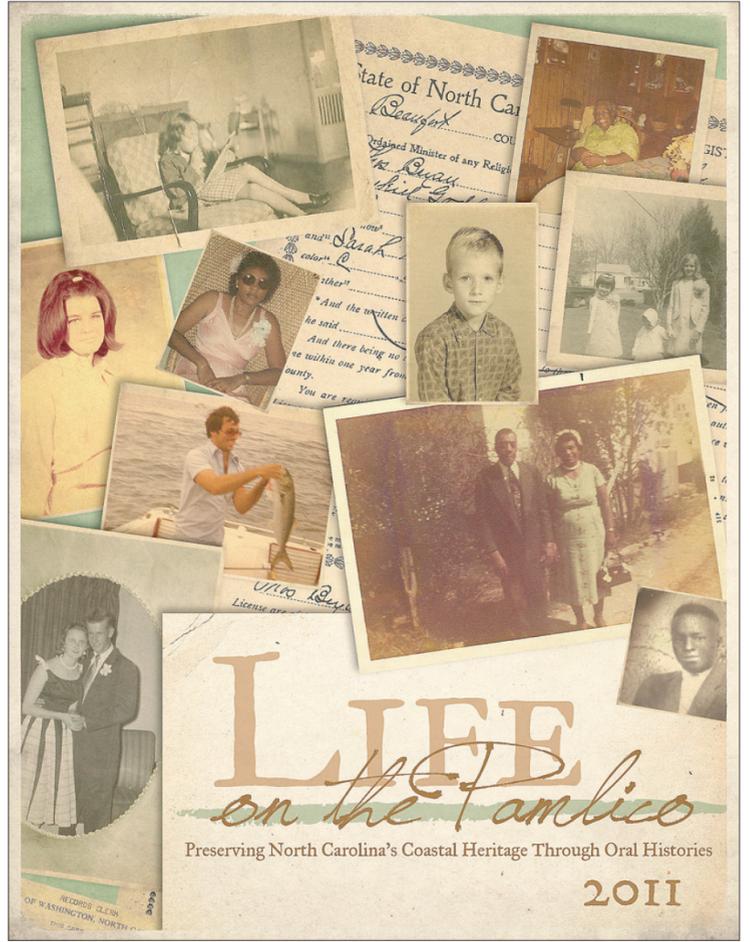
Simpson agreed: "There are a lot of stories to be told."

The 2011 edition of Life on the Pamlico is available online at www.beaufortccc.edu/lotp.



BCCC student Kenneth Worsley believes the way Henrietta "Mudduck" Gorham overcame adversity can inspire young people today.

Jean Roberson Simpson (below) with husband, Gilbert "Mac" McDelmer Simpson. Simpson's story is told by her daughter.



The cover of the digital magazine, Life on the Pamlico, seeks to blend the old images it contains with the digital age, according to the publication's designer James E. Casey



Shirley Jean Roberson's life in a family of 22 children growing up on a farm near Hamilton inspired her daughter, Charlotte Simpson, to include her story in Life on the Pamlico.



Henrietta Gorham's children, Alex, at right, who later died from heart disease, and Fumel. Gorham's story is told by family friend Kenneth Worsley.

Bryan Oesterreich, BCCC English instructor, and James E. Casey, coordinator of BCCC's Academic Support Center, consult on the design of the 2011 edition of Life on the Pamlico.

