

under the sun

For Bennie Moore, Life Began Anew At Age 60

BY SUSAN USHER

Bennie Moore plans to watch his daughter graduate from high school.

That doesn't sound unusually optimistic, but it should. Bennie became a father for the first time on Friday, Jan. 18, at 9:46 a.m., immediately earning the nickname "Strom Thurmond" from doctors at Grand Strand General Hospital in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Sen. Thurmond, who fathered a child in his 70s, would be about the only person unimpressed. Bennie may look to be a well-built 45 or 50, but he became a father at age 61, when most men have reared their families and are looking forward to Social Security checks.

"I wasn't carrying on like I've seen a lot of fathers," he recalled in a recent interview, basking in pride as he carefully held his slumbering 12-day old daughter. "But I knew I was a father."

He first held Alisha Danielle just moments after her birth by Caesarean section and has since helped with all aspects of her care—except one.

"When he changes a diaper I'll let you know," promised his wife, Earline Moore.

When Alisha graduates in 2003, Earline will be 59. Bennie will be a young—and extremely proud—79 years old. He thinks the odds of getting there are pretty good. His own father lived to age 76, his mother to age 89.

A perennial bachelor, the Hickman's Crossroads native enjoyed playing the field for about 60 years before he met the right woman. Earline, a native of Pensacola, Fla., moved to the Grand Strand area about four years ago.

"I never thought I'd get married—until I met her," Moore said, all the while grinning mischievously. "I bird-dogged it, seeing this one one night, that one another."

He simply wasn't the marrying kind; friends would have bet on it.

Earline, "Candy" to her friends, had experienced one failed marriage and had no plans to wed again. The mother of two grown children—David, 23, and Tina, 21, she liked her newly found independence. She was self-employed; she was a survivor.

Luckily, love finds its own way.

Fifteen months after they were introduced by a

mutual friend, the two married on May 5, 1984, in a formal ceremony at Andrews Chapel United Methodist Church at Hickman's Crossroads.

Less than 10 months later, they became the parents of a beautiful nine-pound, 1½-ounce girl. Last Wednesday evening after coming in from his job tending the hog parlor at Indigo Farms, Bennie had finished giving a colicky Alisha her evening bottle when he and Earline sat down to talk.

"I was totally shocked. Once I got over that I was tickled," Earline said, recalling her first reaction upon news of the pregnancy.

"At first I was going to leave her," Bennie quipped. Instead he started making the sometimes awkward adjustment in roles from independent bachelor to both husband and father in less than a year's time.

Because of their ages parenthood hadn't been part of their original plan, but you couldn't tell it by looking at them today. With Alisha Danielle in their arms, Bennie's and Earline's happiness is obvious.

"I wouldn't trade her for a million dollars," Moore said as he looked lovingly at both wife and daughter.

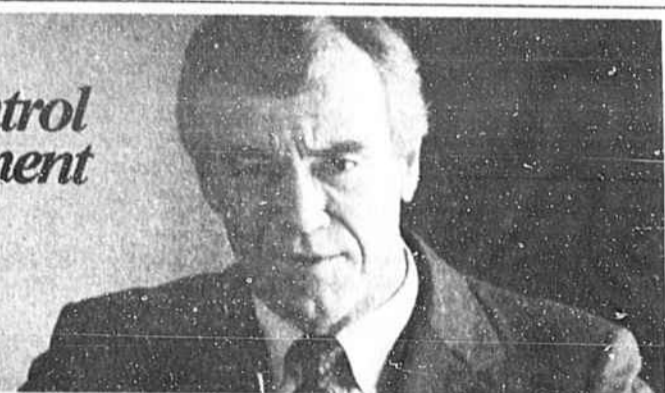


A SNUGGLE from her dad, Bennie Moore, wasn't enough to wake 12-day-old Alisha Danielle, but a trace of a smile flickered across her face.



...AND BABY MAKES THREE. Bennie, Alisha Danielle and Earline Moore are settling into family life at Hickman's Crossroads.

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