

# FEATURES

## ESCU— a family tradition

University attracts three generations of loyal Vikings

By B. Kaleema Overton

One hundred years ago Elizabeth City State Normal School began with 23 students. Today, even though the current enrollment exceeds 1,700, ECSU is still a family affair. And the University takes pride in not only planting the seed, but also in nourishing the entire family tree.

Just like every family has a provider, Mr. Hugh Cale provided Elizabeth City State Normal School with one main ingredient for educational nourishment. That ingredient was the House Bill of 383 introduced on January 17, 1891. At a time when the "Negroes" in Eastern North Carolina were frustrated and considering going north to find real freedom and equality, Cale said, "Not so. We will not leave, we will stay and fight for our rights."

Cale's House Bill gave birth to a new kind of "Negro," in North Carolina—the educated one.

When you plant a seed it must be nourished and it must have light in order to become a tree. In celebration of the 100 years of ECSU there's no better way to show you those years of excellence than to show you the forest we have produced through one seed planted in 1891. In this article we will feature those who have seen three generations of nourishment through ECSU's "family affair."



Cleo Turner (center) chats in front of Bias Hall with friends Mary, Melba, Charity, and Nicia.

### The Longs

Being a third generation student gives me a special feel for this article. There's no better way for me to end this article except to feature my own family who has attended ECSU since 1922.

My aunt Eula Speights of Elizabeth City attended Elizabeth City Normal School in 1922, which was then a two year Normal school. She returned in 1924 and graduated from the four year college in 1928.

"When I first attended it cost \$2.50 per month. At that time the school wasn't accredited. I had to return to school to get my degree, which I got in summer school."

After graduating from Elizabeth City my aunt Eula went on to teach 2nd grade in Williamston, North Carolina for 32 years and then in Bertie County for 15 years.

"We were well prepared, lots of the teachers there (Williamston and Bertie) graduated from Elizabeth City," says Eula Speights, adding that there wasn't time to worry about any lack of socializing.

"We didn't get to attend student activities. Right after school we had to go home."

"The students who lived on campus had curfews, were required to go to church every Sunday and could never leave campus without a chaperone."

You may ask yourself what is the difference between a 1928 graduate and a 1991 graduate, well it's all in the heart.

"Teachers back then were more serious about their work and more dedicated."

In 1950 my aunts Joyce and Justine Long (who are twins) entered the gates of Elizabeth City State College.

According to Justine Long on of our major problems as far as education is "there aren't enough Black teachers. Teachers are seen as role models, students now are getting less than we did. If there were more Black teachers the students would be able to communicate better."

My twin sister, Krystal Overton is a senior Applied Mathematics major and believes the school should remain predominately Black.

"We only have a few HBCU's and they are the link to the African-American future. I don't think that anyone will fully realize their importance until, by lack of dedication, they are gone."

How does the 1990's student compare the social life of the 1950's and 1930's is well worth looking into.

"Well, now we definitely have more distractions socially, but the school's potential is there. The school is what you make it, you have to take advantage of all of it's opportunities in order to be successful."

The schools biggest weakness in 1990 is the lack of understanding,

"Some of the faculty and staff members feel that they know our problems because they were once students here. However, our problems today are really almost a world apart from the problems of yesterday," said Krystal Overton.



Cleo Turner gives a high key profile in a college photo. Turner is a former student at Elizabeth City State Teachers College in the late 1930's. Turners daughter, Gail Turner and granddaughter Kay followed in her path.

### The Littlejohns

For Sonja and Kevin Littlejohn and their cousin Shelby Streeter being surrounded by immediate family is the best feeling of home away from home.

The Littlejohn's have 15 graduates from ECSU, including aunts, uncles and grandparents. Sonja says to her this is definitely a family college.

"At first I said that I'd never come to this college here but now I'm glad I did. I enjoy following tradition."

Sonja did not give her heart to ECSU blindly.

"Elizabeth City State University had to earn my pride," she says. "It's true I had a prior history of ECSU, but I still had to feel my way through and get adjusted just like everybody else."

A junior Social Science major from Roper, North Carolina, Sonja says her only regret so far is that currently ECSU doesn't have a graduate program for the Social Science Department. Her biggest concern is that the growing number of white students are now attending ECSU won't measure up to those who put money back into the school.

"It's disgraceful. You don't see African-Americans attending the predominantly white schools and not giving back. They use us as a stepping stone, and they never look back or acknowledge us."

Sonja admits that although that is a problem it's good to attend a small college "because you have that personal touch" that you don't get at larger schools.

"One of the greatest strenghts is the closeness that you are allowed with the faculty. My advisor, Mr. Riddick, really guided me in making my educational choices."

Sonja's mother, Mrs. Betty Wilkins Littlejohn, told her to study hard and know your instructors, Sonja followed her advice and that lead her into a successful college career.

"Elizabeth City State actually was more than I expected. At first the social life of the campus seemed boring but it's what you make it. It can't be constant fun; we came for an education."

Sonja's grandfather, Pete Littlejohn, now deceased, graduated from ECSU in 1940, beginning a tradition that has been followed 18 times over.

Other graduates from the Littlejohn family include: Lora Wilkins, Ester Johnson, Clint Wilkins, Kennis Streeter, E.V. Wilkins, Anne Streeter and William Littlejohn.



Posing left to right: Kay Turner's mother Gail and grandmother Cleo beside another of Kay's relatives.



Standing from left to right: Shelby Streeter, Sonja and Kevin Littlejohn. Sonja and Kevin are brother and sister and Streeter is their cousin. In all, the Littlejohn family has had 15 members graduate from ECSU.



Kay Turner profiles on ECSU campus. Turner's mother and Grandmother both attended Elizabeth City State.

### The Turners

Kay Turner of Owings Mills, Maryland is one of the many third-generation students now attending Elizabeth City State University; walking in the footsteps of her parents and grandparents gives her a sense of stability.

"Being a third generation student puts you at a greater advantage because it gives you a greater history and a feeling of safety," she says.

Kay's grandmother, Mrs. Cleo Turner, says that she, too, felt safe in her new family.

"When I attended Elizabeth City State Teachers College in 1939 the president knew every student," she recalls. "There was a good relationship between the students and the staff. That's one of the reasons why Elizabeth City State Teachers College turned out the best teachers in North Carolina."

Kay's mother, Gail Turner, graduated from ECSU in 1974. As a young person she recalls that she was not forced to attend ECSU but chose to because of its closeness to her home. That was the start of a family tradition.

According to Kay even though they said she had a choice, she got the feeling that attending ECSU was a must. Today, she still retains her ties to her alma mater.

"I've been to every Homecoming since I was four years old," she said. "That should tell you something!"

A junior Business Administration major, Kay says that her parents and grandparents told her many stories, mostly about the physical changes of the university.

"There were no trees between Bias and Butler back then, but the pot holes were still there. It doesn't mean anything to hear about the pot holes until you fall in one. That's literally following in your parents footsteps."



Standing from left to right: Mary Long and Dr. Ridley. Ridley was one of the University's first Chancellors.