

great story on growing up on H.I.

MEALS OUT OF THE CREEK

Rosa Chisolm
Born in 1896

At home in the water as well as on land, they often sailed to Bluffton to buy the things they could not raise or catch or make for themselves.

At the age of eighty-five, living alone in a mobile home in the Spanish Wells area of Hilton Head Island, Rosa Williams Chisolm could remember how it was when she was a child. Her father "could always catch crab and get conch" when other meat was scarce for his family of six. Rosa said she loved both. She often thought about how it was when her husband fished for a living. Seafood was the family's staple. Rosa would roll her big brown eyes. "Fish and sweet taters. That's what I loved," she said.

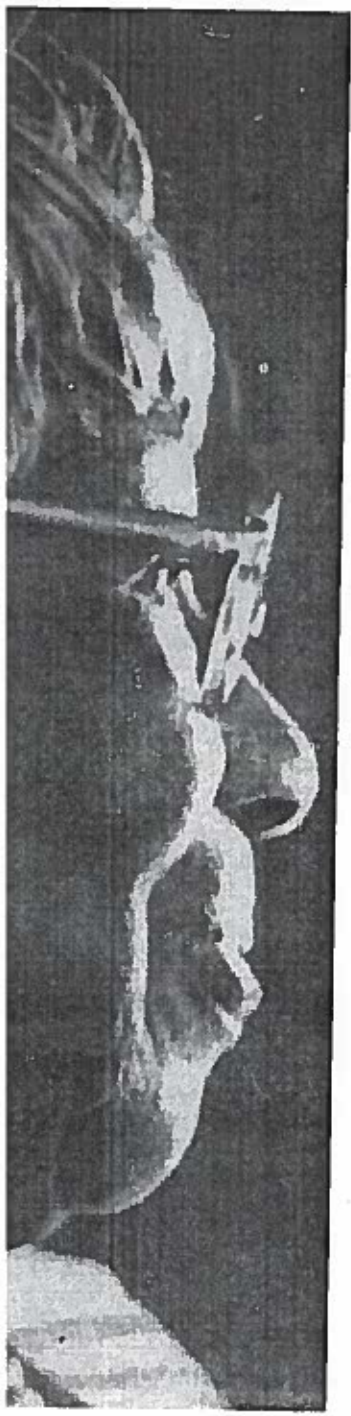
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Born on Braddock's Point in what is now Sea Pines in about 1896, Rosa grew up in a thriving community there. Although the deer "always cleaned out the peas," she said, her father, Julius Williams, grew enough corn, beans, sugar cane and okra for the table while raising cotton for cash.

In the good years, Rosa and the other neighborhood children—called the "Point Children"—went to school from November to March. She explained that it wasn't possible in those days to have a school all the time but that the men would get together after a season of good crops and "work up a school for us." Many children didn't begin their formal education at all until the age of ten or eleven. "We were big children before we started lessons," she said. "That's why we learned so good."

When the Point Children weren't doing their lessons in the early 1900s, they hoed and picked in the fields of Henry Padgett, a white man. They went swimming in the same creek that produced the fish for supper. After fourth

Fran Marschey



grade, Rosa decided she liked the work in the fields so much and could make so much money that she dropped out of school. Mr. Padgett, she said, found her to be such a good farm worker that he paid her as much as he paid her mother.

BUGGY RIDES TO CHURCH

There was no church on Braddock's Point. For the families who lived there, getting to services at the old Oak Grove Church on what is now Mathews Drive was a weekend production. Once a quarter, the Point families would travel by horse and buggy and on foot to spend Saturday night with relatives or friends somewhere in the middle of the island. "All the roads would be crowded up with people," Rosa said as she recalled those days. They would go to church Sunday morning and walk or ride in a buggy back to Braddock's Point on Sunday afternoon.

Since there was only a small store on the south end of the island, Renty Miller's store at Point Comfort, the Point families sometimes traveled to the north end to shop. At home in the water as well as on land, they often sailed to Bluffton instead to buy the things they could not raise or catch or make for themselves. To the young girl who spent so much time working in the gray sandy soil, the colorful patterns on the bolts of cloth in Bluffton stores were the prettiest things she had ever seen.

In 1913 Rosa married Reuben Chisolm, a young man also born on Hilton Head to a family of fishermen and farmers. Reuben and Rosa settled in the old Lawton Plantation on a spot near the present Heritage Farm. Like their parents, the couple grew some cotton. He fished Calibogue Sound, Broad Creek and Lawton Creek. Reuben used hooks and lines, cast nets and gill nets to catch croaker, whiting, trout, flounder, crabs, shrimp and anything else he could get out of the water to sell. "He had been raised up in the creek," Rosa said. "If it was in there, he could catch it. We ate so much fish then, sometimes I wished I had married a butcher so I could get some meat," she said, laughing.

Reuben Chisolm stored his catch all week long in ice he "hired," in Rosa's words, from the "line boat" that traveled between Savannah and Beaufort. On Thursdays or Fridays he hauled it from Lawton Landing to Savannah by sailboat, taking advantage of the tide as well as the wind as much as possible.

Rosa sailed with him to Savannah sometimes, glad to have a chance to see the sights and buy a few things there, but wary of what she called "big water" between Hilton Head Island and Savannah. "I didn't mind it when it was little waves," she said, motioning with her hands. "But when it was rough, oh boy! Sometimes the gunwale would almost go underwater. I'd climb to the other side. My heart would almost come out of my body, I was so scared."

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Honey Horn Plantation and the southern tip of Hilton Head Island, including Lawton Plantation, changed hands after the stock market crash of 1929, ending the era in which tenants paid no rent for living on the land. The new owners, Landon Thorne and Alfred Loomis, cleared their property of residents. Reuben and Rosa Chisolm then bought two acres in Spanish Wells, just across Broad Creek, and Reuben kept on fishing.

From time to time, Reuben would go off to Savannah to find jobs. He would bring beef back when he came on weekends. Rosa, Reuben and their children also gathered and sold musk, a native Lowcountry plant once used widely for its fragrance. As Rosa remembered it, during World War II, musk was "worth plenty" at the processing barn in Bluffton, and they "could gather plenty of it."

HAND "GOOD FOR THE CROPS"

In those years, Rosa was occupied bearing children, tending to babies and having miscarriages. She got pregnant sixteen times in the thirty-three years she was married. In addition to raising youngsters, she raised "more than a garden," she said. "I farmed. I made plenty of beans and everything. One year I made a truck full of cotton—me and my children. I didn't mind doing it either. I liked opening up the row and putting the corn in. My hand was good for the crops."

When Rosa was seventy-five, she was hoeing a row one spring and caught herself turning around to see how far she'd come, then looking forward to see how much farther she had to go. "When that happened, I said, 'Lord, just let me finish this garden, and I'll never put my hand to a hoe no more.' And that was the last year I planted."

"But I've done my share of work. I satisfy [*vic*]," she said.

In her later years, Rosa enjoyed a few adventures that took her away from the familiar soil. She traveled to Boston by bus three times, staying three months once and sightseeing with her children and grandchildren. She liked Boston. She had cataract surgery in the Hilton Head Hospital, and she liked the hospital staff and the results of her operation.

"A soon as I could see again [after the operation], I could cook for myself. I put on a pot of beans with pigs' feet, and it was so good," she said.

In her eighth decade, Rosa's pleasures included a pipe of tobacco and a can of Pabst Blue Ribbon every evening while she watched the news on TV—as well as her memories. She often thought back to big cotton crops, buggy rides to church, flounder catches, spring tides, sailboat rides to Savannah and meals of soul food, especially seafood.

"Fish and sweet potatoes," she said, smiling. "And a little grits. When I was in Boston I knew something was missing, but I couldn't figure it out. It was grits. I have to have my grits—and a little bit of fish."

11/20/2013 - 1913 = 1902 ✓
Died 11/4/2013 check 1910 Census 117

Remembering Rosa Lee 'Hump' Chisolm, a woman of the water

choes still ring across the creek from a Hilton Head Island woman who all but lived on the water.

Not many women did what "Ms. Hump" did. Rosa Lee Chisolm rowed her bateau up and down Broad Creek until she was pushing 80 years old — when her children insisted she come up on the hill and rest with her ducks and guineas.

he went into the creek alone, wearing pants, a cap and warm clothing.



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Others say they loved to hear her singing or whistling as she pulled the oars, always in rhythm with the tide, wind and moon.

Spiritual songs echoed across the

creek, a sweet sound against the clanks of buckets and the buzz of outboards. But Elizabeth Chisolm says her mother's favorite song was the Ray Charles hit "(Night Time Is) The Right Time."

Rosa Lee Chisolm was born almost 89 years ago to Richard and Viola Chisolm on the south end of Hilton Head Island. She was raised on the water in an area now called Calibogue Cay in Sea Pines. When she died Nov. 4, she was buried beside her parents in the Braddock's Point Cemetery in Harbour Town.

She lived in the same ways of her parents: eating fresh vegetables, fruit

and nuts from the land and fish from the creek. They raised hogs and chickens to eat, and cotton to sell. "They got everything from the earth," Elizabeth Chisolm said.

Her daddy made "Hump" a shrimp net and a mullet net. He got Solomon Campbell to build her a bateau. She could always bring home more fish than anybody. People wondered how she did it, just as they were puzzled by how she got her nickname. She knew the silent signs in the creek, and passed it down to four generations.

As a young woman, she earned her living from the creek. Elizabeth said

her mother would pass big barrels of crabs straight from her boat to one from the Blue Channel cannery in Port Royal. In the winter, she shucked oysters for Frank Toomer on Skull Creek.

At some point, "Hump's" daddy moved up the island to farm a tract on Marshland Road now called Chisolm Place. When I met her there in 2005, she sat in her neatly raked backyard, surrounded by potted plants in a warm December sun. Beside her were two buckets filled with pecans. In front of her was a pen of yacking

Please see HUMP on 5A

HUMP

Continued from 3A

ducks. Half a dozen dogs were in other pens, raised off the sandy ground. A German chicken ran around, looking like it had just gotten its hair styled. From somewhere came the call of a rooster.

"Hump" knew the ways of shrimp, crab, clams, mullet, speckled trout, red fish, flounder and conch.

She also knew the ways of people. And she was ready, willing and able to fight wrongdoing.

"God don't like ugly, and very little pretty," she told me.

As I cross the Charles E. Fraser Bridge near her home and look down in the marsh to find her boat, I can still hear echoes across the creek.

"Don't you tell me how