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Pageland Mother Dies in New Year's Day Fire

Jasmine Burch heroically saved her sister's life during house fire before being overcome by smoke



Jasmine Burch

Jasmine Burch, a 25 year old mother from Pageland, SC, died on Sunday, January 1 in a house fire in Wadesboro. Burch was one of five people who were in the home located on White Store Road. The four survivors, including a handicapped adult, were taken to the hospital for smoke inhalation and minor injuries.

Jasmine Burch's mother Gwen Burch-Myers said that Jasmine was the mother of a six year old daughter, Ja'Kirah. "Jasmine died saving her sister. I understand she pushed her sister out of the window, and told her to open the front door. And Jasmine just didn't make it back."

Burch tried to fight the fire and was overcome by smoke, officials said.

"I loved her very dearly. She was my only daughter," Burch-Myers said. "We were just like two peas in a pod." According to firefighters, the fire was started by a candle in the kitchen, and flames gutted the house. The home is a total loss.



Anson County's American War Mothers Gather...in 1918

Adorned by flags at the Anson County home of Mrs. James A. Hardison in 1918 are the original members of the American War Mothers. This group was organized during or soon after World War I.

They are, from left, seated: Mrs. Charles Winfree, Mrs. Judith Dockery, Mrs. E. C. Griggs, Mrs. E. P. Liles and Mrs. W. J. McLendon. Standing: Mrs. James A. Hardison, Mrs. R. E. Little, Mrs. B. G. Covington, Mrs. J. W. Pinkston, Mrs. H. H. Cox and Mrs. W. O. Crump.

Photo courtesy of Peggy Pinkston

New Jersey Woman Traveling with Great-Granddaughter to Morven Found After Missing for Four Days

A 71 year old New Jersey woman, Barbara Briley, was driving to Morven with her five year old great-granddaughter, La'Myra Briley, and the two went missing. They were missing from Christmas Eve, December 24 until Wednesday, December 28 when they were found in Virginia. Briley and La'Myra had departed Hamilton Township, New Jersey enroute to Morven, and were last seen about



Barbara Briley (left) and La'Myra Briley

5:30 p.m. on December 24 at an Exxon station in Ruther Glen, Virginia near Interstate 95.

The search for the pair ended shortly before 5 p.m.

on Wednesday, December 28 after days of frantic searching by family and law enforcement. Briley and La'Myra were found by a Dinwiddie County, Virginia property owner who had noticed a strange vehicle, which was Briley's Toyota RAV4, and went to check it out. The landowner found Briley and La'Myra. Briley was sitting against a tree unconscious, La'Myra was alert and appeared to be unharmed. The Virginia State Police said evidence points to Briley having pulled onto a dirt road which she followed about three-tenths of a mile before pulling off into the woods. She had driven over a small tree, and got stuck in the remote area when she tried to back up. Based on evidence recovered at the scene, it appeared that Briley and La'Myra were there for several days, but were sustained by their snacks. "Where they were found by the vehicle, there were some juice boxes, some apples and other items," said Virginia State Police Sgt. Steve Vick. "It appears they had been eating and drinking several things during that time period."

Briley, who didn't have any known medical conditions, regained consciousness and was flown to VCU Medical Center by Med-Flight helicopter for treatment. She is in serious condition, officials said. La'Myra received a medical evaluation at the scene and was released to a family member.

Major William Knott of the Dinwiddie County Sheriff's Office told the media that the property owner had seen the initial missing persons report and knew who Briley and La'Myra were when he found them. He immediately notified the police. Knott says the landowner was instrumental in saving Briley's and her great-granddaughter's lives.

Officials said they don't suspect foul play in their disappearance.

Jennifer Lindsey, Barbara Briley's niece who lives in Morven, said her aunt was on the phone with family members as late as 8 p.m. on Saturday. "But, no one could reach her by 10 p.m.," she said. During the time the pair was missing the family put up fliers along the route they would have traveled, and they searched the area.

On Tuesday Briley's cellphone pinged a cell tower in Dinwiddie County near Petersburg, Virginia between 1:30 and 2 a.m. according to Caroline County, Virginia Lt. Travis Nutter. "The phone was quickly turned back off, and there were no other traces on the phone after that," Nutter said. "The cell companies were not able to get a geographical location of the phone. All they could say was that the phone was somewhere in the radius of that cell tower when it turned on."

During the search for Briley the Caroline County Sheriff's Office obtained surveillance footage from the Exxon gas station that Briley stopped at Christmas Eve, and talked to a witness. The video showed Briley stopping and asking for help with her GPS. Nutter said the witness at the gas station, who said he spoke with Barbara Briley, said she asked for directions to get back onto Interstate 95.

"The witness told us that he saw the child in the back seat of the car," Nutter said. "He didn't see anyone else in the car, and nothing seemed out of place."

Multiple law enforcement agencies from New Jersey to North Carolina, as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, were involved in the search.

What is Anson Connecting Families?

4-H Youth Promise is introducing a new program called Anson Connecting Families. This program will provide the education to assist in modifying moderate to serious problems at home, school and in the community. Parents will also increase their knowledge and skills to provide appropriate structure and responsibility for their children. The overall goal for the program is for youth and their parents to learn to better communicate assertively and effectively, resist negative influences, appropriately resolve conflict and to make better choices for a healthier lifestyle.

This program will be offered once a week for 8 consecutive weeks. Sessions will be held weekly at the Cooperative Extension Office, located at 501 McLaurin Street in Wadesboro, on Tuesdays from 6 until 8 p.m. All enrolled participants will be provided transportation, a family style meal and childcare. Referrals are accepted from the court system, juvenile court counselor, school counselor, community agencies, or parent/self-referral.

To learn more about Anson Connecting Families program please contact Program Director Sam Cole or Case Manager Quantelya Dumas for further information at (704) 694-2915.

Anson's John Lester Harris, a World War II Buffalo Soldier

John Lester Harris of Lilesville served with a unique group of soldiers in World War II. He was a radio operator with the 92nd Infantry and rode with a commander on the front lines, fighting the Germans in Italy. They moved mostly at night, and much of the fighting occurred in early mornings. Harris relayed artillery targets on suspected German locations, as given to him by his commanding officer. The Germans had big artillery guns dug back into the mountains on tracks. They would roll the guns out and the U.S. units endured the shells zooming over their heads. The 92nd pushed the Germans back until they surrendered. Harris remembered seeing lines "as far as he could see," of German prisoners marching with hands on their heads.

The 92nd Infantry consisted of African-Americans known for the tradition of "Buffalo Soldiers." The original Buffalo Soldiers were part of the famous 10th Cavalry at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas in 1866. Their main purpose was to protect settlers as they moved west by fighting the Indians. The name was given them by the Indians out West because of thick coats made from buffalo hides the black soldiers wore during the winter. Also their fierce and brave nature reminded the Indians of the buffalo, so revered by the Indians. Buffalo Soldiers also fought in the Spanish-American War in Cuba, Philippines and Mexico, and in World War I in Europe.

John Lester Harris was born in Lilesville 95 years ago. Along with his wife Janie of 67 years, and for much of his life, he has lived within sight of his church, Henry Grove Missionary Baptist Church, where he first attended school. There were no black schools at that time and churches often became the school house. Different rows of church pews represented different grades. The church served as a school for six years until the Henry Grove School was built next to it, where he graduated from high school. The church still stands today, but the school is gone.

After high school he went to work at "the cement plant" in Lilesville, which made huge cement forms that he had to push around on a wheelbarrow type device. This plant was likely the WR Bonsal division. After the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, he was drafted and rode a bus to Fort Bragg. He would end up at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, where the training of Buffalo Soldiers would continue for 18 months. From there they were shipped to Italy.

After World War II he was glad to be home and got his old job back at the cement plant. While working there he used a VA program to go to school to learn brick masonry. For the next 20 years he worked for various contractors, laying the first bricks at the new county high school built in 1959. Years later he would teach brick masonry at Bowman High School, the first totally consolidated high school in the county. After 13 years of teaching he retired.

Looking back, Harris said he has had a good life. Will Simon, Coach Fred Worthy, Jolly Little and Billy Marshall also served in World War II as Buffalo Soldiers, all from Anson County. In 1948 President Harry Truman issued an executive order eliminating segregation in America's armed forces, and the last all-black units were disbanded shortly thereafter.

We salute John Lester Harris and the brave Buffalo Soldiers from Anson County who served their country when called and then returned to serve their communities.

By Tommy Allen
(Tommy Allen, the former Anson County Sheriff, is president of Anson County Historical Society.)



Business After Hours at Anson Health & Rehab is Thursday

Community invited to see renovations taking place, enjoy delicious hors d'oeuvres and meet the staff

Anson Health & Rehab in conjunction with the Anson County Chamber of Commerce will hold a Business After Hours event this Thursday, January 5, from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Under the leadership of Administrator Gay Lookabill, Anson Health & Rehab has undergone major renovations, and she invites you to come see the beautiful results so far. Heavy hors d'oeuvres will be served. This is also an opportunity to meet the staff.

Anson Health & Rehab is located at 405 South Greene Street in Wadesboro. The telephone number is 704-695-3301.

50+ Club Meeting to Feature Country, Bluegrass and Gospel Music

The Hampton B. Allen Library announces the 50+ Club meeting for Monday, January 9 in the Little Theatre at 10:30 a.m. Ted Latham will be presenting a program of country, bluegrass and gospel music. He will be accompanied by Dr. Leon Smith, David Napier and Allen Billingsley. Everyone is invited to come, bring a friend and enjoy the music of these talented men.

For more information call the library at 704-694-5177.

Storytime Every Wednesday at Partnership for Children

The Anson County Partnership for Children offers Storytime in the Early Childhood Resource Center each Wednesday, from 10 to 10:30 a.m. for children ages 3 to 8. For more information call 704-694-4036.

Board Meeting January 24

The Brown Creek Soil & Water Conservation District monthly board meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 24 at 10:00 a.m. at the BCSWCD office, located at 1758 Morven Road in Wadesboro. For more information call 704-694-3516.