

N O W   T H A T   W A S

# worth it!

*Revealing the best investment you ever made*

Real estate, savings bonds, reliable transportation, a good book, an engagement ring, a long walk, a trip home, time with your children, time in church. Sooner or later, if you're careful and sometimes before you know it, your serious investment pays off. And as we know, one payoff invites you to try for another.

Here are stories about the best investment you ever made.

## ***Moving to North Carolina***

The best investment I ever made was moving to North Carolina from New York. I lived in New York until I was 24 years old. Where I came from wasn't all that great. I lived in the projects in NYC, and it was rough. My son and I had to go through times when we would hear gunshots and yelling and fighting every night.

It was September 1995 when I made the decision to move here. Even that was hard, because I left my mom not knowing if she was going to be around for another five years. But I knew I had to leave because it was not a good place to raise children, in my opinion.

Once I moved here it took approximately one year for me to get married, get my license and purchase my own home. When I left New York I had no ambition, but once I moved here I got a lot of ambition to further my education, get married and purchase a home. If I was still in New York I don't believe I would be this far. So to anyone who thinks that prayer and persistence don't work, I am certainly a witness that they do work.



*Grycel Butts  
Hertford, Albemarle EMC*

**GO ONLINE** See more stories about your investments and other experiences on our Web site. Thanks to all of you who sent us stories. Next month we will publish your stories about the first place you lived on your own: "Finally On My Own." (Deadline was Dec. 15.) See upcoming themes and rules in our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series on page 18.

## ***The secondhand rings***

I met my wife in 1957 while serving in the Marine Corps. It was love at first sight, and two months later we were to be married. I didn't have money for a ring and against everyone's advice, we used the ring of a divorced friend of my wife to tie the knot. We returned the ring after the ceremony and about two months later a friend of mine broke up with his fiancée and offered to sell me the rings for \$50. I considered the prospect of using a divorced woman's ring and then buying the rings from a failed engagement, but I decided the price was just too good, and besides, I wasn't superstitious.



Looking back after 47 years of marriage, I have concluded that the \$50 rings which are now worth about \$1,200 were truly a great investment. But they don't compare with the 47 years of joy that I received for just over a dollar a year.

*Doug Dickenson  
Cedar Point, Carteret-Craven Electric Cooperative*

## ***The bicycle***

I bought myself a bicycle for my 48th birthday. I'm not sure how it happened really. It just seems one day a bicycle appeared beneath me and I've been riding it ever since. I'd forgotten how much fun it could be. You experience so much from the seat of a bike. The early morning fog caressing a lake as your wheels whistle softly on the pavement. The smell of cooking from a kitchen window or sweet honeysuckle down the road. The wind in your face and hearing snatches of a car race on someone's portable radio. How good plain old water tastes.

Recently my wife and I rode over 90 miles in two days to raise money for the multiple sclerosis society. I see a lot more of my neighbors who have taken to riding. My last medical check-up I had lost weight and lowered my cholesterol and blood pressure, all without medication. I'm healthier, happier and a nicer person.

*Danny Roberts  
Thomasville, EnergyUnited*

### **The little yellow cottage**

As a young lieutenant with a dog, I received orders to Naval Facility Cape Hatteras in 1976. I always rented a place to live and planned the same for this tour of duty. I discovered the Lighthouse Café in Buxton for good food and pristine, empty beaches, but no place would rent year-round and allow a pet.



Reluctantly, I looked at homes to buy. My stomach churned at the thought of debt. I found a little cottage close to the beach and work that I could afford. Sleepless nights followed signing the papers, but soon that house became a home. For 2½ years I loved my little home and my dog loved the beach.

Twenty-eight years later, I still own that little cottage. It now has central heat and air. The house has been the honeymoon cottage for my brother, my brother-in-law, my nephew (in the picture from 1978), and most recently my goddaughter.

The little yellow cottage that turned blue and gray and later dark brown shake cost me less than my current truck and is worth far more than its appreciation. It's still a refuge and holds 28 years of memories for me and my extended family who have spent time there.

*Leslie Skowronek  
Buxton, Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative*

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### **Bringing up the children**

When most people think of investments, the bulls and bears of the stock market come to mind. But the type of investment I'm going to share is about babes and bonds.

While my three children were growing up, I was a stay-at-home mom except for a few part-time jobs. It was important for me to be home to take care of them and instill in them valuable life lessons. We had our own set of sayings. "Disobey and you will pay," I would tell them if they got out of line. This goes along with the Biblical teaching, "You reap what you sow."

There were many gallons of Kool-Aid on summer breaks from school that refueled the whole neighborhood. The back door seemed to open and close continuously like a revolving door. Lessons they learned during those years would mold these kids forever. They formed character and bonded relationships for a lifetime.

My two sons and daughter learned from an early age that God should be the center of their lives. Honesty and responsibility were also at the top of the list.

As I look at these young adults now, I can truly say that the best investment I ever made was spending time at home with my children. I can still see God molding and pruning them to be men and women of integrity. You truly do reap what you sow.

*Ann C. Wayne  
Davidson, EnergyUnited*

### **The 1972 Vega**

Actually, the worst investment I ever made turned out to be the best. My friend Jerry offered to "fix up" a wrecked 1972 Vega which I purchased for \$300. The car looked as if it had fought with a semi and lost, but it ran. And aside from hammering out the fenders and a paint job, I thought I had a bargain.

Jerry informed me he just happened to have five gallons of "psychedelic orange" fluorescent paint in the back of his warehouse. My car ended up the color of a crossing guard's vest and could be seen from another state! Needless to say, I did not feel like Cinderella going to the ball as I drove around in my glaringly bright pumpkin coach. One foggy morning, as I was on my way to work, a five-car pile-up suddenly loomed in front of me. A man in a station wagon behind me was barely able to stop in time. As we slowly maneuvered around the accident, the man leaned from his window and said with genuine relief, "Thank goodness I saw your car! What's that color called anyway?"

"Lucky," I managed to reply.

*Sandy Dahlhofer  
Clyde, Haywood EMC*



### **Pepper the paint horse**

Nine years ago I bought a paint horse and named him Pepper. He had one blue eye and one brown eye. I didn't know then just how much I would learn from Pepper.

I've learned that in showing a horse, sometimes you win and sometimes you lose, but either way you've got to have fun. We had a rough start because Pepper was not completely broken, and I was an inexperienced rider. We eventually learned to trust each other and began competing at local horse shows. Today, Pepper and I have won many awards and have competed in many horse shows, barrel racing and trail events. It takes a lot of time to own a horse, and I think every minute has been worth it. Pepper is part of my family and my life would not be the same without him.

*Misti Reid  
Lexington, EnergyUnited*

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### My trip to Italy

All investments aren't intended to reap monetary gains. The best investment I ever made was spending \$3,000 to fulfill a dream. The return on this investment could never be measured by my bank account. Unlike money, what I did receive will last forever.



I spent two weeks with my best friend in Italy. There I enriched my life in ways worth far more than mere dollars. I stared into the eyes of 2,000-year-old statues, ran my fingers across the grooves of chariot tracks, leaned against marble columns built before Christ was born and marveled at artwork and architecture that I had previously only seen in books. I walked cobblestone streets and tasted Italian wines. I took photos of the elderly and the young, the natives and the tourists. I sang "God Bless America" on another continent on the Fourth of July.

Words, photos and videotapes could not capture all that my heart felt. The memories, however, are vivid and clear. I returned to my Tar Heel home with a great sense of patriotism, an appreciation for 110 voltage, ice and cold air conditioning. I learned that the greatest investments aren't always in stocks and bonds. Invest in an experience. Invest in a dream.

Lynn Jacobs  
Tar Heel, Four County EMC

### Sapphire

The best investment I ever made was a house and land in Sapphire, serviced by Haywood Electric. The house was two stories and modest in style and condition but had 11 acres with it.

When my husband became ill and was hospitalized for over a month, we were in deep financial trouble. We had bought a smaller house which we rented in Lake Toxaway and had problems making payments. While it was rented in the summers it paid for itself, but in the winters it was a serious debt. Because our larger house in Sapphire was on the same mortgage with the rental house, we were in danger of losing both. We were able to sell the larger house, pay off the rental house and move into it, mortgage-free.

Any land that is not in the flood plain has the potential of becoming much more valuable oftentimes within just a few years. I personally know at least two people who bought land when their children were small and sold it when they began college. Their small investment paid for the entire tuition for their children for their four-year college sojourn.

As the saying goes about land: "They're not making any more of it."

Betty Sherrill  
Lake Toxaway, Haywood EMC

### The "can-do" man

The best investment my husband and I ever made was the purchase of a beach house. In the spring of 1992, we went for a weekend to Ocean Isle Beach to reserve a house for our summer vacation. We had discovered Ocean Isle with its canal houses several years earlier and had been spending our vacation time there.

When my husband came from the realty office with a key to a house for sale, I was flabbergasted. There was no way we could afford a beach house. But my husband is a "can-do" person who not only found a way but convinced me, too.

Now, 15 years later, we still can't believe our good fortune. Not only is our home worth five times our original cost, but, more importantly, we've had 15 years of fun with family and friends. Now we are retired and living at Ocean Isle almost year-round. Had we not purchased our "dream" 15 years ago, we could never have it today.

Although our best investment together was our beach house, my best investment was marrying my "can-do" dreamer nearly 40 years ago.

Mrs. James Hudson  
Ocean Isle Beach, Brunswick EMC

## Send us your best Earn \$50

Here are the themes in our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series. Send us your stories and pictures about these themes. If yours is chosen for publication, we'll send you \$50. You don't have to be the best writer. Just tell it from your heart.

#### March 2005 Wacky Plants

Pictures of strange-looking or unusual garden plants or produce.

Deadline: Jan. 15

#### April 2005 Road Trip Horror Stories

Where did you go and what happened? Send pictures.

Deadline: Feb. 15

#### May 2005 Safety Lessons

Accidents and mishaps that taught you a safety lesson.

Deadline: March 15

#### June 2005 On the Farm

The best things about growing up or living on a farm.

Deadline: April 15

#### July 2005 The First Meal I Ever Made

What was it and how did you like it?

Deadline: May 15

#### August 2005 What I Learned From My Kids

Sometimes children can teach grown-ups a thing or two.

Deadline: June 15

#### The Rules

1. Approximately 200 words or less.
2. Only one entry per household per month.
3. Photos are welcome. Digital photos must be 300 dpi and actual size.
4. E-mailed or typed, if possible. Otherwise, make it legible.
5. Include your name, electric co-op, mailing address and phone number.
6. If you want your entry returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (We will not return others.)
7. We pay \$50 for each submission published. We retain reprint rights.
8. We will post on our Web site more entries than we publish, but can't pay for those submissions. (Let us know if you don't agree to this.)
9. Send to: Nothing Finer, Carolina Country, 3400 Sumner Blvd., Raleigh, NC 27616  
Or by e-mail: carolina.country@ncemcs.com.  
Or through the Web: www.carolinacountry.com