

BOOK REVIEW

Book tells story of financial perseverance

BY MIKE HOLTZCLAW
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Pamela M. Covington does not like the world welfare. It's too loaded with social stigma and preconception, she said, so she prefers to call it anti-poverty programs.



Covington

But in the title of her book, the Hampton resident doesn't back away. "A Day at the Fare: One Woman's Welfare Passage" tells her story of losing it all, accepting government assistance and getting herself and her family back onto solid ground.

"One of the reasons I wanted to write the book in the first place was seeing horrendous video of 'wel-

fare shaming,'" Covington said. "You see someone in a public place making a con-niption, like at the checkout line at the store or anywhere people might be using the benefit card to buy food."

"In my life, it feels like it was a billion years ago that I needed that kind of help, but you still feel it. I go to book vendors events, and there among the mysteries and the fiction, here's an African-American woman and guess what she's got a book on — welfare. People have the tendency to think of welfare and see African-American women, but data shows it is not predominantly African-American families who need assistance. But it's still the picture in many people's minds."

Covington, 62, will talk about her book and sign copies 1 p.m. Saturday in downtown Hampton at the Dog Eared Books store, 52-C Old Hampton Lane.

Most of the financial hardship she recounts in "A Day at the Fare" took place in Jacksonville, Fla., where she fled from Georgia with two young children in December 1983 to escape what she says were the uncontrollable effects of the post-traumatic stress disorder her first husband brought home from his military service in Vietnam.

"I was not sure what I was going to do once I reached Florida, but I needed to put some distance between me and the situation in Savannah," she said. "My children (ages 9 and 1½) and I fumbled around town in a truck for five days before I could convince someone to take a risk on me by letting me rent a very dilapidated apartment. We had one window in the front, one window in the back, and bedrooms with no air conditioning in Florida."

She said she and her

children received assistance for three years while she took classes at a community college and tried to pursue a career. A former radio broadcaster, she studied communications and ultimately began writing for newspapers, including a fledgling USA Today.

She remarried and moved to Virginia Beach in 1990, taking a job as a training instructor at Newport News Shipbuilding. A few years later, she wrote the first half of "A Day at the Fare," and she said when she was laid off in 2010, she took it upon herself to finish the project. She published it in 2016.

"I was determined to pick it back up," she said. "I wanted to inspire other individuals who are facing some adversity in life so that they don't have to adopt a sense of futility. I want them to try to realize certain strengths that are within

Want to go?

Who: Pamela M. Covington, author of "A Day at the Fare: One Woman's Welfare Passage"

When: 1 p.m. Aug. 4

Where: Dog Eared Books in Hampton, 52-C Old Hampton Lane

Info: dogearedbookshampton.com



each of us, to be resourceful. I want to see people use the welfare system

for what it's meant to be — get into when you need help, and then get out."

She is looking forward to her appearance in Hampton. She said at most speaking or reading engagements, she gets more comments and anecdotes than ques-

tions.

"People tell me they are inspired by my story," she said, "and a lot of them recall some point in their life, or a family member's life, when they needed to use that safety net. I hear, 'Oh, I remember my grandmother having food stamps,' and I can share with them my story as proof positive of what the anti-poverty program can do for people who want to work themselves out."

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