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**Horseshoe crab research leads to discovery of a message in a bottle;
*Bottle found after floating for 8 years***



(from left) Gale Pierce, Linda Headley, Linda Reddit and Teresa Heath stand next to *The Ink Pad* sign in the unrecorded subdivision of Jemlands in the unincorporated part of Levy County on Friday (March 29). *The Ink Pad* is headquarters for *HardisonInk.com*. Heath is holding the bottle she found and two of her colleagues are each holding one of the two pages of the message put in the bottle on Nov. 21, 2010. (The Ink Pad sign was made by B4 Signs & Advertising of Williston.)

Story and Photos By Jeff M. Hardison



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CEDAR KEY -- Three Dixie County women and their friend from Levy County were helping with horseshoe crab research after Hurricane Michael (Oct. 7-16, 2018) hit Cedar Key, and what they found goes far beyond the number of crabs at a point on an island.

Although the then 10-year-old fourth grader (at the time) tells the reader her name is Airadesa, she tells the recipient her correct name at the end. The Post Office box in Cedar Key is no longer active for this recipient, though.

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The messages sent in 2010 and found in 2018, and now shared in 2019 are seen above on the two pages put into a bottle.

The women accepted an invitation Friday (March 29) to *The Ink Pad*, where they shared their story with *HardisonInk.com* as the first media outlet to have it.

Teresa Heath of Dixie County, Linda Redditt of Old Town, Linda Headley of Cross City and Gale Pierce of Williston were helping the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences' (UF/IFAS) Nature Coast Biological Station (NCBS) conduct horseshoe crab research.

Savanna Barry, a Regional Specialized Extension Agent based in Cedar Key at the UF/IFAS NCBS. Mike Allen is a professor of Fisheries and Aquatic Science in the School of Forest Resources and Conservation at the University of Florida, and he was appointed as the director of the UF/IFAS NCBS in 2015.

Heath, Redditt, Headley and Pierce were serving as volunteers as they worked with Barry and Allen in regard to horseshoe crab research. There are five areas on Cedar Key which are routine survey as part of the research regarding horseshoe crabs.

The four volunteers were out on the beach near George T. Lewis Airport in Cedar Key.

After they had conducted their survey to see horseshoe crabs, Heath and Pierce were walking on Airport Road, when Heath noticed a bottle in a pile of seaweed and debris that had washed from the Gulf of Mexico side of the road to the other side of the road.

Heath said she knew it was a bottle, but she saw it was corked and there was something inside. "I thought it was bamboo at first," Heath said. "Then I saw it was a message."

The two women scurried back to their other two friends as they tried to determine a method to remove the cork.

Redditt had the answer.

"I used my Swiss Army knife," Redditt said.

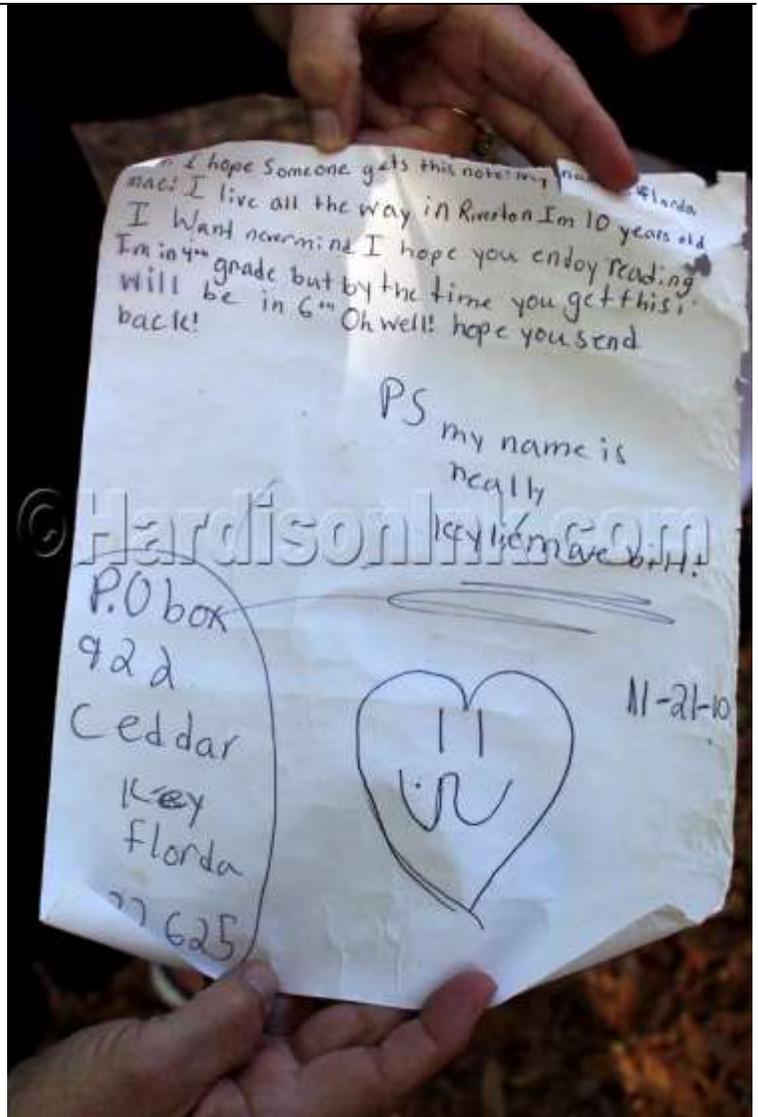
Even with this wonderful tool, which she has carried in her purse for more than 40 years after first buying it at Bill Jackson's Sporting Goods (now known as Bill Jackson's Shop for Adventure) in Pinellas County, it took the women about 20 minutes to move the cork out of the way.

At least part if not all of that cork remains in the bottle, however the two-page rolled-up letter was removed.

Dated Nov. 21, 2010, it was found in October of 2018 – about eight years later.

The letter writer is Kylie Mae Bill, who was 10 years old at the time and she was in the fourth grade.

In her message, she noted that she loves Florida and would like the finder to return the letter to her at a Post Office Box in Cedar Key.



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The four-member team of volunteer horseshoe crab surveyors attempted to return the letter, but the post office box is no longer being rented by anyone. In fact, since the letter was thrown into the Gulf of Mexico, the island has been evacuated at least twice.

And the Cedar Key Post Office was closed for months after Hurricane Hermine (Aug. 28-Sept. 8, 2016) brought the Gulf of Mexico into downtown Cedar Key, severely damaging several buildings – including the Cedar Key Post Office.

Interestingly, when the young Miss Bill threw her message in a bottle into the Gulf of Mexico off of the coast of Cedar Key, the UF/IFAS NCBS was a motel.

The story gets even better.

Teresa Heath the woman who found the bottle, has a history with finding amazing bottles.

Heath was born in Bermuda as an American child in a military family. Bermuda is where she grew up as a child. She found a 250-year-old bottle on the island. She still has a very old paper news story from that historic occasion.

“Growing up in Bermuda,” Heath said, “I always said, ‘I wish I could find a message in a bottle,’ but I never did. So, then I come all the way here to Cedar Key, and I find a message in a bottle.”

Heath said she found the antique bottle when she was 15 years old.

Redditt said the women turned the information over to Barry, to help promote horseshoe crab tagging.

“We said, ‘Look this may happen to you. You may find a message in a bottle,’” Redditt said.

Heath said Dr. Allen was impressed by the coincidence of her having found that unique ancient bottle in Bermuda, and then to have found this bottle that floated just off the island for eight years before coming ashore with the debris from Hurricane Michael.

Barry was able to locate the message-writer and they communicated by email.

Kylie Mae Bill (the message-sender), now 18 years old, was contacted at her Illinois home by HardisonInk.com on Friday afternoon (March 29).

“I actually threw out the bottle in Cedar Key off of my friend’s aunt’s deck,” Bill said. “It was just a regular bottle my friend’s aunt gave us. I don’t remember much details on the specific bottle.”

Bill said that when she was first contacted by UF/IFAS researcher Barry about the find, it made her happy.

“I was getting ready for school when I received the message,” Bill said in regard to when Barry contacted her. “I actually was having a rough morning and this came as a complete shock. It brightened my day tremendously.”

When she was asked what inspired her to send a message to any unknown person by putting the message in a bottle and then throwing it into the water, she said “I always as a little girl heard of those stories where people put messages in a bottle and someone thousands of miles away found it. Although my message was only found in Cedar Key it brought back a lot of memories.”

As for the four horseshoe crab survey volunteers – who are also Tri-County Master Gardner Volunteers – they say they will be looking for more bottles in the future. And then, of course, there is the dream of going to Fowler’s Bluff and finding a pirate’s chest full of gold...