

Thressia Dell Walton-Colbert

Thressia Dell Walton-Colbert was born November 28, 1911 to Willie Osborne Walton-Johnson and Augusta Porter-Bush. At the age of seven, in April 1917, her mother passed and left her to help raise her little sisters Valvarion (18 months old), Christeen (5 years old), and brother Willie George (3 years old).

They lived 100 feet from their Grandma Ellen Walton's house. Their daddy would go to work and Grandma Ellen would teach her how to count to 100, and how to tell time on the clock, while working for the white people. Her grandma also taught her how to take care of her siblings and how to wash, cook, and iron. Stel was born 2 years after slavery, that's how she could tell what age she was.

Stel attended a one- room school "South Bend", until the age of 10. It was built on one acre of land. She stayed home from school for two years to take care of Grandma Ellen Walton who had lost her eyesight. At the age of 12, she and her sister and brother (Willie, and Christeen) walked 12 miles back and forth to school. She fondly remembers her favorite teachers: Mr. Willie Whitman and Mrs. Willie Mae Douglas, as well as her principal Mr. Claude Allen. Stel finished high school in 1935 with a graduating class of 13 students.

Since her Grandma had lost her eyesight and was no longer able to work outside the home, her grandma was instrumental in helping to get her a job working in Linden Texas. She worked for Ms. Pearl Allen and Ms. Taylor washing, cooking and taking care of their children.

Stel attended Prairie View College in 1935 where she studied General Education until January 1936. During that year, a bad storm came through Linden while she was away in school and her Grandma Ellen's house blew off its foundation. Of course, this was a major disaster and their house was a "wreck". Her dad worked at the saw mill and he didn't have the money to continue to pay her college tuition. So she left College, stayed in Houston with her Aunt Ever Whitman's son Ben and his family. She got a job working in a Grocery store for about six months and was able to continue her studies at Jack Yates College at night while working during the day. When school was out in June, Stel returned to Linden and worked various jobs.

While living and working in Linden, her first child Thay Myrtle Harrison was born (March 1938). Five years later (July 1943), she moved to Portland, Oregon to work in the shipyards. She married Andrew Colbert on August 12, 1943 and later sent for her baby sister (Val), her husband (Magnolia Green), their son (Bobby Lynn) and her daughter (Thay Myrtle). By Christmas of 1943, they sent for her sister's (Christeen) husband Charlie D. Kelly. In May 1944, Charlie D sent for his wife (Christeen) and 5 of their 8 children (Carol, Henry, James, Mae & Cemmie). In September 1945, Stel went back to Linden and brought back Christeen's 3 remaining children (Charles L, Morris, and Willie John) to Portland.

Several cousins and in-laws came to live with Stel and family including Mr. Lathan Love, Jessie Mae Braxton, George Jackson, Artie Mae Hunt, Nattie Russell, Mr. Webster B. Whitstone, Professor Henderson (Fairview School) and many more friends and relatives. In 1948, the Vanport Flood misplaced 18,000 people and families. Stel lost everything in the flood except for her daughter Thay Myrtle and a comb and brush set.

In June 1949, her second child (Margaret Ann) was born. Stel purchased a home in 1953 and lived there for 56 years. She continued to do domestic work for several years before retiring in 1963.

As noted above, Stel has truly been a "Pioneer for this family". She's been there for everybody; whether she was babysitting, picking somebody up from school, taking someone to the grocery store and the lists goes on and on.

Many thanks to Margaret Gates (Stel's daughter) & Fara Kelly (Willie John's daughter) for capturing and sharing Stel's history.

Fara recalls: Looking at a documentary on the History of Portland while sitting in a meeting at work. And there's Aunt Stel, as one of the first black women to work in the Portland Shipyard! And of course I yelled out go back that's my Great Aunt!

Fara expresses a special note of gratitude and appreciation from the family to "Aunt Stel" and states with certainty that "we lost Grandma Christeen early in life. I feel like Aunt Stel has been there to fill that void. I don't know where a lot of us would be without her."