



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

My Life My Story

VA Hudson Valley Health Care System

This story is being told by the Veteran in their own words. No facts were confirmed or discounted.

Harold

Well, what can I say, "It all started with my mom." I am third from the youngest of 11 children, 8 boys and 3 girls. I grew up in Charleston, SC and was well protected, after all I came from a family with many males. My eldest sister Ruth, didn't attend school, she was 18 years my senior. But she enrolled me when I was 6 years old. My mother was always very proud as I was an A+ student, and really excelled in reading and writing. I would improve my reading by reading the newspaper, and it paid off as I was often pulled into grades above me to demonstrate my advanced spelling skills. I also loved sports. In the 8th grade, I went to see a high school basketball game and the coach asked his assistant to pull me from the stands and give me a uniform to play in a basketball game. In that game, I got a reputation since I was able to make so many baskets. My teammates would often request the coach to let me play from that point on, but I didn't officially become a member of the team until 9th grade. At the time when I started grade school, high school only went through 11th grade, but they changed it while I was in school, and I was able to play basketball for 5 years through 12th grade. In 10th grade, my team made it to the South Carolina State Basketball Championships and won. I was the only child in our family to graduate high school and my family (especially my mother) was extremely proud.

You see, my grandmother lived in Magnolia Gardens, SC. This is one of the worlds most premier gardens. I remember in 2017 they dedicated the cabin she lived in and made it a nature center. They also named a flower after her, called "Camellia". There was a friend of mine that grew up in that area too, Leech. We knew each other through the Saint Andrews' Parish where my mother was raised. He and I have stayed in touch, and he was invited to my 90th birthday party recently but was unable to attend due to health reasons.

Charleston was always my home. I never crossed the town line until I was 13 years old, and at that point it was due to traveling for Baseball and Basketball. As a child, I always longed for peace. I enjoyed fishing and spending time alone at the Two Rivers in Charleston. I recall I would take a fishing line with a hook to create the ability to fish. I would often catch Catfish. I also taught myself how to swim there. However, I wasn't supposed to swim. My mother was always upset when I came home, and she could see the salt water embedded on my skin. She was such a disciplinarian, but she needed to be as she had 8 boys. My brothers were often sent to those rivers though to bring me back home. One of my brothers joked that I became a good pitcher because when they would come to get me for dinner, I would throw rocks at them to make them go away!

Two weeks after I graduated High School in 1951, I joined the rest of my family in the Harlem/Manhattan area. I played baseball then for a league in Central Park which was sponsored by a local sporting store and was scouted to pitch and play for the Pittsburgh Pirates, but I didn't make it because they thought I was too thin.

The military was embedded through my family. All 8 of us boys served. I remember I was 8 years old at the time and hearing about the war on the radio. My oldest brother, William Fred was in the Army Air Corp and trained in Mississippi. At that time, the Air Force had not been formed yet. My brother Frank joined the Navy, he trained in the Great Lakes, Illinois. We couldn't believe that he joined the Navy, because he sure couldn't "swim worth a lick." He served on an aircraft carrier, the USS Kwajalein in the Pacific and I recall each time their ship was bombed and needed to come in for repairs the service men were able to go home on leave. Many times my brother did not want to return and had to be

picked up by the MP's. Who could blame him though, who would want to return to being bombed? That brother who was in the Navy received a purple heart from that time frame and my other brother (a marine) would often joke and state, "the only reason you got a purple heart is because you got hit in the head with a pot." At that time, you see, most African American sailors were put on kitchen duty and those pots were massive and really could cause injury. The oldest of the 4 of my brothers all served during WWII, I recall the youngest of those 4, Thomas was returned home though due to the 5 Sullivan Brothers who were all lost during WWII.

The four of the brothers that served following WWII, 3 of us were Army and 1 a Marine. I was infantry during the time of Korea and my two brothers were Quartermaster/Supplies. They saw combat, I did not. My one brother, James also received a Medal during that era. He received the Bronze Star for his actions when a Korean attempted to sneak onto the compound and he engaged him in a firefight.

I recall when I left stateside, I took a cruise ship out of Seattle, Washington in 1954. We were on that ship for 16 days until we arrived in Korea. I was part of the 25th Division but shortly after was recruited into the Honor Guard and transferred to 8th Army Headquarters. My unit of the 25th Division left Korea shortly after I transferred and went to Scofield, Hawaii. I remained in Korea and trained new troops for the Honor Guard. Being part of the Honor Guard, we had tailor made outfits and I quickly made the rank of Corporal. There was a soldier that was in our unit less time than I was but had more time in service as part of the National Guard and I was upset when he made Sergeant prior to me. I asked for a transfer shortly after and transferred to 7th Division. As part of the 7th Division, they applauded me for my leadership skills, and I formed and trained an Honor Guard with their Regimental Headquarters and was promoted to Sergeant shortly after. I made this rank after only 16 months in the military and then chose to ETS after 21 months in 1955.

After my time in service, I worked some odd jobs until I took the Civil Service Exam. I worked for the Post Office for 30 years and held multiple positions and made my way up quickly from General Foreman, Operational Manager to Superintendent. My superiors always liked my organizational qualities and how I led my supervisees. When I made Superintendent, I recall it was reflected upon that, "I was the only one who met regularly with supervisees". One devastating part of working in the Postal Service was when we had a major fire because the pulley system didn't turn off. This was in 1966 and many bags of mail caught fire. We rescued as much mail as we could and as a result of our efforts, I received a Commendation Medal from the Postmaster General. That incident was torturous for my wife and family, since they couldn't reach me and were watching it all on the news. Fortunately, there were no injuries.

My Postal Service career ended after 30 years (1989) and I then entered a 3rd Career and ran a Senior Center for 20 years in the Bronx. After the recent pandemic my wife and I chose to have a quieter life and moved to Dutchess County in May 2022. My wife of 55 years and I now live in a Senior Community in Dover Plains. I am her sole caretaker as she was recently diagnosed with Parkinson's Dementia. But I finally got to have my own porch which was unrealistic living in the Bronx in a high rise for so long. I am fortunate that I married in 1960 and had two children, my daughter is in Pawling and my son resides in the Bronx. I still enjoy fishing and in 2016 was honored to participate in an Honor Flight to Washington, DC.

I am the Patriarch of the family at this time, as I am the only sibling that is still alive. And at the age of 90, I was able to bring it full circle. I requested to return to Charleston this year to celebrate my birthday and my family was able to arrange for a celebration at Henry's, a restaurant that I worked as a busboy in High School. But in that era, I wasn't allowed to go through the front door of the restaurant. The new owners of Henry's recognized the significance of the event and wanted to change that experience for me. We had 60 guests and family who flew in for my birthday, I came through the front door and they threw a BIG celebration! Afterall, did I mention, "It all started with my mom, and we were from Charleston, SC".