



Mr. James Coleman

February 29, 1920 - April 15, 2013

JAMES THOMAS COLEMAN

His life was somewhat unique from the day he was born February 29, a date that graces the calendar only once in every four years. The birthplace was tiny Roe, Arkansas. He was the first born of the marriage of William Coleman to Sarah McDuffey. The family moved to Minnesota (William Coleman worked for the railroad), and in 1926, the Coleman's-William, Sarah, 6-year-old James and younger brother Willard-came to Milwaukee.

William Coleman died when James was 11. Sarah's oldest son was a scrappy young man. He was street smart and alley tough. He was creative and enterprising-and he was always protective of young Willard. James was graduated from the old Lincoln High School. He married Mildred Beckley. They had two children, Vickey Jean and Erskine Jerome. He served in the Army in 1944 and 1945, and he married a second time, to Justine Malone. They had three children-Jerome Randolph, Sharon Lee and Milton Richard. He later married Jamesetta Woods.

James Coleman's working career was typical of that of many young black men of his generation who came north during the Great Migration. He was a porter at the old Ardmore Barber Shop as well as in the first-floor barber shop of the YMCA that opened an ultra-modern high-rise adult facility on Wisconsin Avenue. He was a laborer on construction sites and asphalt paving crews. He

painted signs for neighborhood businesses, cleaned restaurants after hours, worked shifts at the American Motors plant and finished his work life at the Super Steel Products Corporation.

No matter where he worked during his 87 years in Milwaukee, James Coleman rarely lived very far from Walnut Street, which by day and by night was the Main Street of community life in the Black Milwaukee of those years: Larry's Chicken Shack and Bert's Snack Bar; the V & V super market and the Tastee Freeze ice cream shop; Hillside Pharmacy and the Apex taxi service; the Regal theatre, the Savoy and the 711 lounges; Hampton's Dry Cleaners, T. Joe's laundry, the St. Vincent's thrift store and Celo's haberdashery; Roosevelt Junior High School, and the Lapham Park playground; Greater Galilee Baptist and St. Matthew's CME churches and O'Bee's Funeral Home. James knew them all, and they knew him.

He relished the social and cultural life of the time, with its dances, cabarets and Sunday matinees. He was an active member of the Townsman Social Club, and would pack the family into his car-"Bouncin' Betsy"-for the club's annual picnic in Brown Deer Park. He regularly ventured out to the public links as an avid golfer. But his greater love was bowling. And he was pretty good at it, recalled brother Willard, who James introduced to the sport and recruited onto a team. But he also was a pioneer. James Coleman was one of the founding members of the Sunday morning league of black bowlers at a time when the national white organization did not welcome them. Later, as an active member of the black Milwaukee Bowlers Guild, he traveled to tournaments in other states. Even as his eyesight waned from glaucoma and he couldn't see the end of the lane that well, once told which pins were still standing, he knew where to drop the second ball in order to pick up a respectable spare-if not always the 7-10 split.

In later life, James remained a sharp dresser, a charmer, a man with a quick wit who knew how to tell a story. He could strike up and keep a conversation with anyone, and anywhere in town. He discovered that some of the satisfaction he once found in back rooms up and down Walnut Street could also be found at a place called Potowatomi. As always, he loved a good cigar.

In the very long twilight of his very long life, James answered yet another calling. For more than a quarter-century he was known to many a resident at the Lapham Park Senior Citizen high-rise simply as "Mr. Coleman," the man who for 20 years was their champion as president of the Lapham Park Residents Organization. "He would help anybody who needed help around the building," said Katie Morehouse. "He was just an outgoing person ... And he loved his dancing."

His faith strengthened in his latest years and he frequently asked caregiver Lois Seabrooks to recite with him a verse from the book of Isaiah: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. "

His children- Vickey Jean Dennis, Erskine Coleman (deceased), Jerome Coleman I (deceased), Sharon Wilson and Milton Coleman-bore James Coleman 20 grandchildren: Bridgette Coleman, Cheryl Coleman, Christopher Coleman, Cynthia Coleman, Eric Coleman (deceased), Jerome Coleman II, Kim Bilbo, Michael Coleman, Michelle Wiesner, Monique Gales, Nichelle Coleman, Samantha Coleman, Sekou Coleman, Sherri Anderson, Stephanie Coleman, Tess Coleman, William Coleman, Mark DeCou, Maurice DeCou and Tracey Shields; and a host of great and great, great grandchildren. He also is survived by brother Willard and former wives Mildred ("Mickey") and Jamesetta.

Cemetery Details

Graceland Cemetery

6401 N. 43rd St.
Milwaukee, WI

Previous Events

Visitation

APR 22. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

Northwest Funeral Chapel
6630 W. Hampton Ave
Milwaukee, WI

Service

APR 22. 11:00 AM (CT)

Northwest Funeral Chapel
6630 W. Hampton Ave
Milwaukee, WI