

John J. Williams 1906-2001

His family moved to Milwaukee in 1923. His father, Reverend Samuel Williams became pastor of Calvary Baptist Church.

He attended Lincoln High School, now Lincoln Center for the Arts, then worked as a Pullman Porter in the kitchen of the trains that came into Milwaukee.

He graduated from Milwaukee Teachers College, now UWM to be a high school teacher. But he could not get hired to teach in Milwaukee because MPS did not hire Black teachers in 1923, so he found a position in Oklahoma to teach high school.

He and my mother returned to Milwaukee in 1942

And in the mid 1940's he started his own newspaper company, The Milwaukee Globe.

John Williams worked at the Tannebaum Tannery and started the first women's softball team to build camaraderie between Black and white workers.

He was the first Black taxicab driver in Milwaukee working for the Yellow Cab Company, then brought in Black women to become drivers.

He worked in the Post Office here in Milwaukee as a "mailman" downtown and on the East side. He was promoted to a supervisor and employment officer and worked there for more than 40 years. He was recognized by the Postal Service for helping implement the ZIP code in Wisconsin in 1963.

Then in 1967 he retired... for the first time.

He worked for the State Higher Educational Aids board, helping students find scholarships, then he retired again.

He joined the Milwaukee Urban League becoming the manpower director. He helped dozens of people find and keep jobs in and around Milwaukee. He believed in the power and dignity of work.

In 1959, my father helped the Milwaukee Urban League find its new executive director. He recommended Wesley Scott. Scott served as Executive Director until 1981. In Daddy's obituary in 2001 Mr. Scott said, "John's whole life was something that was unusual. He was one of the soldiers, not the general, because he didn't get the credit."

He said "It's the general who gets written up, but it's the soldier who wins the war. John helped a lot of people".

While working with the Urban League and helping students find colleges and scholarships, he connected with Grambling State University in Grambling Louisiana, sending Milwaukee students there for their education.

He also connected with the University of Wisconsin-Platteville encouraging other students to stay in Wisconsin and come back to Milwaukee after graduation. Then Platteville made him an offer he couldn't refuse, so he retired again and went to that campus to get his master's degree at 70 years old.

After getting that degree in guidance and counseling, he was hired by the university to stay on campus and work with students struggling with their transitions to college life far away from home. I sometimes run into those students who thank me for my father's guidance and wisdom.

When my mother, Vida E. Williams passed in 1978 he retired again and came back to Milwaukee. He still volunteered for committees and causes and spend some time back at the Urban League advising students.

My father came back to Milwaukee because he knew he had more to offer.

I hope his involvement and dedication to this city will be recognized by a street-name.

Joanne Williams

