

ALBERT and ISABELLE SMITH

Al was born on April 4, 1916, at the home of his parents above a grocery store at Fifth and Jefferson in Seattle. Al's parents, CLAUDE PERCIVAL (Percy) SMITH and INEZ SMITH were both surnamed Smith prior to their marriage in December 1914 at St. James Cathedral in Seattle. They had immigrated to Seattle from Jamaica via Victoria, B.C., where they had met. Percy spent the majority of his life as a seaman. Inez raised Al and his sister Vera, occasionally supplementing the family income through various lines of domestic work.

Al and Vera attended Immaculate Grade School. Al went on to O'Dea High, a Catholic boys' school, where he was a guard on their championship varsity basketball team in 1933. He was recently honored by O'Dea as its first African-American student, and is a member of the 1935 alumni class.

During summers and after graduating, Al worked the China and Japan sea lanes in a variety of shipboard jobs. In the later thirties he worked for the Union Pacific Railroad as a porter. Even during the depression years, he was never unable to find and hold a job.

Isabelle (Izzy) was born in Roslynn, Washington, on June 25, 1916, to Pearl James and George (Sharkey) Donaldson. The youngest of three children, Izzy's siblings were Spencer (Buster) and Audrey (Livingston).

George was one of nine children of Jessie and Anna (Smalley) Donaldson. A historic figure, Jessie's ancestor, Levi Donaldson, was a Baptist minister born in south Carolina in 1797. George and Pearl were part of a community of black miners who were brought to Roslyn from Tennessee in 1891, originally as strike breakers, by the Oregon-Washington Improvement Company.

Tragedy struck the Donaldsons when Pearl became ill with tuberculosis and died in 1918, leaving George with three small children. He could not raise the children by himself, so Audrey and Buster were raised by their grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. James. Isabelle, two years old, was taken in by Hattie Kelly (Greenie), Pearl's half sister at Pearl's deathbed request. Pearl is buried in the Roslyn Cemetery for Black Pioneers.

Isabelle remained with Aunt Greenie in Roslyn until age seven when she went to live with Greenie's eldest daughter, Lydia, and her husband Claude Norris, a Seattle police officer, in Seattle. She was raised by the Norris family as one of their own along with the Norris children Claudine (Winston), Shirley (Phelps), and Claude Norris, Jr. (Sonny). She attended Horace Mann Elementary School and graduated from Cleveland High School in 1935. After graduation, Isabelle worked as a waitress at Mrs. Smith's Restaurant at 22nd and East Madison Street.

Al and Izzy met through mutual friends, Margaret Gage and Herman Moore. They were married October 26, 1941, at the Immaculate Conception Church rectory, and made their first home in a triplex at 22nd between Spruce and Alder.

Their son Al, Jr. (Butch) was born in October 1942. During the forties, Al worked in the Bremerton Naval Shipyard and Izzy at the Italian Club in Seattle. They purchased their first home at 125 23rd Avenue. After leaving the shipyards, Al worked for the Seattle Engineering Department until 1950, when he became a mail carrier for the U.S. Post Office.

The Smith's daughters, Cheryl and Frances (Ominka) arrived in 1952 and 1953, respectively. Three years later the family moved to their present home at 1106-25th Avenue East.

Al's love for photography began in the 1940s, and grew when he built his first darkroom in their home on 23rd Avenue. His collection historic photos of big band greats was formally displayed by the Seattle Museum of History and Industry in 1987.

In the sixties, as Al continued with the post office and his photography, Izzy became qualified as a secretary first with the Seattle School district, and then as the school secretary at Phantom Lake Elementary School in Bellevue. A few years later she became executive secretary to Dr. George Douglass, Vice President of Shoreline Community College where she worked until retiring in 1979.

Al retired from the post office in 1974, but continued with his second job handling mail at Seattle First National Bank. Now semi-retired, he works at the bank one day a week.

In October 1991, Al and Isabelle celebrated their Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary.