

WALTER VERNON LAWSON, 1926-1982

Seattle ROOTS have certainly witnessed their share of black "firsts" in the Pacific Northwest, but one achiever of three "firsts" was the late WALTER V. LAWSON, son of Luella Lucien Lawson, a current Seattle resident, and the late Virtrum Lawson, Sr. Born in Shreveport, Louisiana, upon discharge from the U.S. Navy, Walt rejoined his family who had move to Seattle. In 1949 he and Jacqueline (Alexander) were united in marriage. The following year Walt joined the Seattle Police Department where he became one of the handful of minority officers. Residing in the Central District during the 1960s, he was continuously aware of and directed much of his attention to the needs of the community.

Walt became the Seattle Police Department's first black Sergeant when he was promoted in 1964. In 1967 a second next promotion resulted in his being Department's first black Lieutenant, and three years later, in 1969, SPD's first black Captain. The promotions were not based on "affirmative action" but were the results of intensive study and dedication to his job. Walt took part in every available related seminar and course that came up, participated actively in community service projects, continuously maintained active visitility within the black community, and studied zealously for each examination. As he put it at the time: "Hard work paid off!"

Finding it difficult to settle down within the Department at a desk job as Police Captain, and always looking for a new challenge, Walt took an early retirement in 1971 when he was persuaded to join the Federal Law Enforcement and Assistance Administration. When the regional office of LEAA was discontinued, Walt transferred to Washington, D.C. where his position was that of LEAA's Director of the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity. In 1980, he was tempted with another new challenge, and accepted an appointment in Alaska as the Director of Administrative Services with the Department of Public Safety in Juneau. He maintained his close associations with black law enforcement agencies and personnel in the "lower 48," and began a quest to recruit black officers to Alaska. It was during this tenure that, while on a departmental recruitment trip to California, Walt was involved in an automobile accident that took his life.

The guidelines that he had given to the young black police officers hopefully laid a positive foundation for many to follow.

In Loving Memory of My Husband,

WALTER V. LAWSON

From Jacqueline, and their descendants:

Children:

Gwendolyn and Sam Townsend, Sr.,
Ronald Lawson, and Michael Lawson

Grandchildren:

Arika and Sam Townsend, Jr.,
Gregory, Anthony, Crystal,
Jeremy, and Chantal Townsend

Great-Grandson:

Talorien Townsend

