

## Family Album Northwest

by Kathryn Bogle

Sometimes in a life when the low places of despair appear to dominate, the inner strengths take over and the high places of the soul take form and outlive. The strengths were always there but now they are discernable and become the driving force from within. You have seen this happen.

So it was with a lady named Gertrude Stitt.

Classmates among the student nurses clipped the Gertrude to "Trudy". As Trudy Stitt she was graduated from Good Samaritan Hospital. She was the first Black nursing school graduate from any hospital in Oregon. This was in 1949.

But let us begin at the beginning, with her family telling the story of this remarkable lady. Letting us know what a strong, courageous woman she was.

Trudy was born in Alabama, in Roanoke, a town about eighty miles west of Atlanta, Georgia. She was the daughter of Joseph Stitt and Susan Jones. Her birthdate was given as March 22, 1926. The hour of her birth goes unknown for there was no clock in the Stitt home. They did not own a clock. They could not afford this luxury.

Concerning the time of Trudy's birth parents and grandparents are certain of this much; the baby was born between the hours of the evening freight train on March 21st and the morning freight train on March 22nd.

Later on the little girl Trudy entered her first school. She had to walk two miles to get there. In those years in the South, white children rode in a school bus to their school while Black children walked to theirs. Trudy showed herself to be a diligent student and by the time she was ready for the eleventh grade she was sent as a boarding school student to Southern Normal School.

Upon graduation in 1945, Trudy was offered a scholarship to Iowa College which she declined because she had decided within herself to become a nurse. Her hopes were that she might enter nurse training in nearby Atlanta.

At Roanoke, meanwhile, several able members of Trudy's family, aunts and uncles included, had joined a great exodus to the shipyards of the West during World War II.



Gertrude "Trudy" Stitt

In a flood of relief Trudy bought her tickets and then she realized that she had been referred to as a "lady". It was the first time she had ever been Trudy was left in Roanoke with the responsibility of caring for two young cousins. Plans would be made to relieve her of child care so that she could go on with her education in Atlanta.

In due time it was decided that Trudy should deliver the children to their parents where they were now living in Vancouver, Washington. Within a few days following, Trudy found herself in Chicago, waiting in line at the railway station for tickets to the west coast.

Lines were long and slow moving. Reservations for departure to the "City of Portland" were made only every other day. Trudy's brow must have furrowed in anxiety as she held the hands of her two small charges and thought of the limited funds in her purse which she had to make last to their destination.

As she inched slowly towards the ticket window, Trudy heard the ticket agent say that he would be closing the window for that day as soon as he had waited on the lady.

Stricken and terrified with the thought that she was now alone and stranded with two small boys in that vast place jammed with strangers jostling each other, Trudy stepped aside and out of line. Seeing Trudy's distress, someone tapped her arm and convinced her that she was the lady the ticket agent meant to serve next.

called a "lady" and now her head lifted and her eyes held a new light. It was a good omen, she felt.

After arrival in Vancouver and joining her relatives there Trudy quickly found work as a domestic. She needed to earn as much as she could for the Atlanta Nursing School term in the fall.

Across the Columbia river in Portland, Oregon, the Rt. Reverend Benjamin Dagwell, Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the diocese of Oregon, had made a special promise. He had pledged his faith in the brotherhood of mankind. He had also been told of the glaring oversight in the hiring practices of all Oregon hospitals. This included the hiring at Good Samaritan Hospital, the progressive and excellent Portland institution of his own diocese.

At that time, and it could be easily verified, there were hardly five Black male janitors in all of Portland's several hospitals (hence Oregon) put together. There were no Black employees other than these few men. There was one nurse, there were no ward clerks, no laboratory technicians. Audrey Ellis R.N., alone represented the entire Black population among nurses in the state. The record stands that Good Samaritan hired Mrs. Ellis in 1943.

Were there any Black girls in nurse training? No, the good Bishop learned. Why? The Bishop wanted to

know. Well, the first Black girl would have to be some sort of superwoman to graduate. Why? The Bishop pursued the topic.

Well, he was told, the first Black nurse trainee had to be a good scholar, she had to have good health and good morals. She would have to have stamina and she had to want to be a nurse above all else. And, of course, a special kind of personality, set with sufficient built-in resilience, would have to be a natural faculty of this jewel.

He had promised, and he would find her, the Bishop concluded.

In Vancouver, Trudy was enjoying being near her family once again. Her family encouraged her to think of staying in the vicinity. They wanted her to try to get into her nursing career in this new locality.

The stage was literally set. Trudy entered Good Samaritan School of Nursing in September, 1946 — the first Black to enter nursing school in the state. She was the jewel found.

Trudy was president of her class when she was graduated in September of 1949. She was voted "best bedside nurse" and she made history by being the first Black nursing school graduate from Oregon. Local hospital doors, closed before to Black employment, now swung open to all regardless of race.

To be continued next week.

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## VOTE NOVEMBER 7, 1978



### Robert Edward Phillips for MSD, Position 11

- Equitable and fair taxes
- Services to the elderly
- Safe communities
- Citizen participation
- Program accountability
- Help for middle income families

Paid for by Robert Phillips for MSD Committee, Position 11, Pat Massey, Treasurer, 5725 N.E. Rodney, Portland, Oregon 97211.

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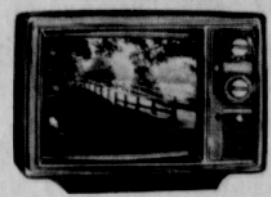


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## PPS provides 24-hour info

Keep the lines of communication open to the public. That's the goal of the Portland Public School's "Citizen Information" service.

Citizen Information, 233-9833, has been expanded to a 24-hour telephone line. During regular business hours, callers' questions will continue to be answered by the public information staff.

Evenings and weekends, an electronic answering service takes the caller's name, address, phone number and question. Staff will contact the caller during the next business

day, or respond by letter as soon as possible.

The Citizen Information service was established about six years ago to help school patrons quickly find answers to questions they have concerning the Portland Public Schools.

Realizing that many people find it difficult to call during regular business hours, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., the Public Information Department installed the phone service to reach those people who might otherwise be missed — just because the office was closed.

## Masons begin crime survey

On Saturday, October 28th beginning at 10:00 a.m., the Portland Police Bureau Crime Prevention Unit in conjunction with the greater Northeast Precinct Council and the Prince Hall Masons will conduct a canvassing in the area between N.E. Failing Street and N.E. Skidmore Street from N.E. Sixth Avenue and N.E. 12th Avenue. The purpose of the canvassing is to generate block

meetings and security surveys; to increase awareness of the burglary crime problem in that area and to solicit any suspect information.

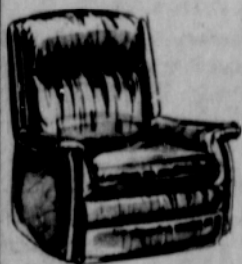
Members of the public are encouraged to "give crime prevention a hand in that neighborhood," by volunteering to canvass. The staging area will be the Matt Dishman Center, 77 N.E. Knott.

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