

Colbert

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this.”

At 14, you could get an adult job, she remembers. And during hard times, many of the young men she knew signed up for the services. She found work at the Lone Star Rifle Co. making shell casings for M1 rifles.

“I worked on the line and we made 38,000 rifle shells in 8 hours.”

Colbert remembers the crime sprees of Clyde Barrow and Pretty Boy Floyd. And that during the Depression many people were constantly on the move looking for a way to survive.

“So many people don’t have jobs,” she says. “Times are repeating themselves pretty fast, because at that time people did not have jobs and they came from every direction.”

Colbert’s husband moved north to Portland, Ore., where he found a good job at a railroad company, and she followed him in 1942. She rented a room at the intersection of N. Larrabee and NE Broadway, she says. She found a job at Gunderson’s shipyard working from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, cleaning ships. One of a team of 12 women, she was paid from \$1.35 to \$1.42 an hour.

“They said some of those ships hadn’t been cleaned in 12 years,” she says. “We were cleaning those ships and getting them ready to go overseas and back.

“The guys were joining the Longshoremen and getting pretty good pay. But those guys weren’t cleaning the ships. The union hall was at 4th and Morrison and they had jobs. You could sign up to be a merchant seaman or work in the shipyard.”

The Colberts moved to Vanport and began arranging for other family members to join them. Colbert drove down to Texas to bring the children to Portland.

“She was very instrumental in bringing people here,” says Kelly. “First she sent for my youngest sister and her husband. Then she sent for my dad and my mom and five of my

siblings. There were eight of us and three of us stayed behind for another six months. I was 10 when my dad sent for us. That was our family in 1946.”

Colbert only gave up driving three years ago, when she was 97. And she still has a great memory, vividly recalling the events of the Vanport flood of 1948.

“The kids were at school,” she says, “and they told them ‘Go home and tell your mother to get to higher ground.’ The kids were running in the streets and people were saying, ‘What’s wrong with the kids? What’s wrong with the kids?’ I remember looking out of the window and seeing water just water for as far as you could see.”

Kelly, who was 11 at the time, also remembers that day. Everyone believed that a lot of people were drowning in the flood, he remembers. Even now he finds it hard to

believe that the official count was just 15 lives lost.

After the flood the children in the family had to go to different schools. Some went to Chapman Elementary, others to Elliot. Families had to stay in makeshift shelters for more than six months.

“They didn’t have anything,” Colbert says. “Just what Goodwill and the Salvation Army gave

them.”

Colbert gave birth to two children, Fay, now deceased, and Margaret, a retired Washington County Deputy Sheriff. She bought a house on N. Commercial at Blandena. She also held down a variety of jobs, working for some time at a poultry factory and also for a Dr. Buck who lived in the Laurelhurst neighborhood.

Many Portlanders remember Colbert as the person who helped them get their first job.



Thressia Del Colbert’s 100th birthday celebration drew relatives from Portland and around the country.

One of Colbert’s lasting legacies is her contribution to dozens of neighborhood children. Every summer she would rent a school bus and organize work parties, taking young people from the neighborhood out to farms to pick produce. For many it was their first job and a source of pride.

“We grew up picking everything they grew in Oregon,” says Kelly. “She drove the bus and took us out to farms where we’d pick beans, strawberries, walnuts, cherries, cucumbers. We went 50 miles in every direction.

“We learned a good work ethic through her. She led by example. I never knew her to smoke or cuss. Aunt Stell was our role model and she was the best role model you could have. I felt that way and I know everyone else did too.”

To this day, people come up to Colbert to thank her for taking them to the fields to work and giving them their first chance to earn money.

“If I took you on the bus you couldn’t go fishing,” she says. “You had to work or you weren’t coming back.”

We honor the many accomplishments of African Americans.



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A family wage, and the benefits that go with it, not only strengthens families, but also allows our communities to become stronger, more cohesive, and more responsive to their citizens’ needs.

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Movies

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Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked (G) Animated adventure finds Alvin (Justin Long) and company running amuck on a luxurious cruise ship only to end up stranded on a tropical island after being accidentally being tossed overboard. Voice cast includes Jason Lee, Matthew Gray Gubler, David Cross, Anna Faris and Alyssa Milano.

Cook County (Unrated) Prodigal Papa drama about a recently-paroled ex-con (Xander Berkeley) who returns home to mend his relationship with his estranged teenage son (Ryan Donowho) only to discover that the boy’s uncle (Anson Mount) has turned the place into a meth lab teeming with addicts. Support cast includes Polly Cole, Makenna Fitzsimmons and Yankie Grant.

Corman’s World: Exploits of a Hollywood Rebel (R for violence, nudity and profanity) Reverential biopic about Roger Corman, the legendary B-movie director who helped launch countless film careers, including those of Jack Nicholson, William Shatner and Robert De Niro, while cranking out a never-ending string of low-budget offerings. With appearances by Quentin Tarantino, Martin Scorsese, Pam Grier, Peter Bogdanovich, Peter Fonda and Ron Howard.

The Pill (Unrated) Better-late-than-never comedy chronicling the efforts of a confirmed bachelor (Noah Bean) to get a girl (Rachel Boston) he just shared a one-night stand with to take the Morning After pill. With Anna Chlumsky, Jean Brassard and S. Lue McWilliams.