



**FROM THE ARCHIVES**

**Colbert**

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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

**‘Aunt Stell was our role model and she was the best role model you could have’**

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 N. 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.

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.

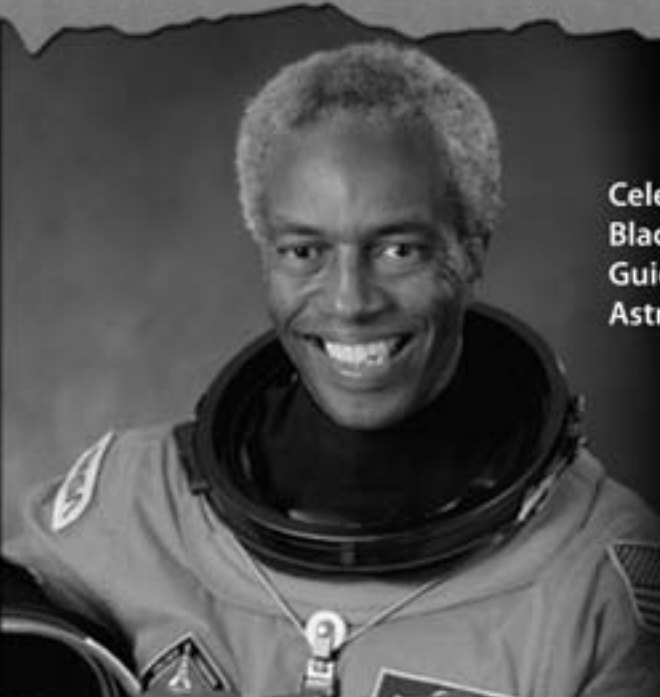
“We learned a good work ethic through her. She led by example. I never knew her to smoke or cuss. Aunt Stell was our role model and she was the best role model you could have. I felt that way and I know everyone else did too.”

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.”

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Greg Wolley: 503.823.6860, [greg.wolley@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:greg.wolley@portlandoregon.gov)  
Loretta Young: 503.823.6850, [loretta.young@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:loretta.young@portlandoregon.gov)  
Gene Jackson: 503.823.9166, [gene.jackson@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:gene.jackson@portlandoregon.gov)

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