

## Chronology of Episodes In The Life

of

W. Albert Jones of Meridian, Miss.

1. William Albert Jones II was born in Demopolis, Marengo County, Alabama on June 19, 1904 to William Albert Jones and Gertrude Edith Fletcher Jones.

Part of his pre-teen years were spent on a farm east of Demopolis where stories indicate that his mother was in virtual slavery. Not much is known of his father, although it is assumed he must have been there also, because Albert, as he was called, had a brother nicknamed "Boots" who was three or four years younger than he. One thing that Albert did on the farm was care for the animals. He knew a lot about horses; and the story of his escape from the farm when he was about twelve involved his being chased by one of the bosses on a horse to be whipped for some transgression. He made good his escape by running and rolling under a barbed-wire fence that the horse would not pass.

2. Circa 1915-17 Albert made it to Demopolis where after some months he had earned enough money to pay for his mother and brothers release. They also settled in Demopolis. At this time his father, who was a blacksmith by trade, had migrated west to an unknown location. Gertrude, Albert, and Boots soon found residence at 513 Strawberry Street in Demopolis where she lived until her death in 1960. Albert and Boots worked at the Demopolis Hotel for a time; but when Albert was about sixteen or seventeen he set out to find his father.

3. In the early 1920's traveling west he did manage to locate his father in Bogalusa, Louisiana, and stayed with him for a time.

Albert worked at a sawmill while he was there. Living with his father at that time turned out to be an unpleasant situation so he returned eastward to Meridian, Mississippi.

4. Sometime in the early to mid 1920's Albert worked at the Southern Hotel in Meridian. In the mid to late 1920's he worked for the Sam Threefoot family. He also became acquainted with the Crowell family, and more importantly with LaBelle Crowell who was the second of five children in that family. On February 27, 1928 they were married and produced one son, William Albert Jones III on March 20 1929.

5. Throughout the 1930's Albert worked for the Threefoots, sold Avon products, drove taxi and worked for the A. J. Lyon family to take care of his wife and son. It should be noted that he was ably assisted by his wife who was an expert seamstress and sewed for many people across the racial and social spectrum in Meridian and Lauderdale County. In short they were a team, and that teamwork continued for fifty-seven years.

6. In March 1941 Albert opened his own business on Fifth Street in Meridian. This was the beginning of his active participation in giving service to his community. He cultivated people who could exercise leverage in the white community. He was able to reduce the brutality of the police on their Saturday night forays through the black community; get people out of jail when they had been unjustly arrested by police of Meridian, including a high profile entertainer who was accused of some liaison with a white woman - one of the ultimate transgressions in Meridian, Mississippi in the 1940's.

He was a co-founder (with Charles Evers, A. L. Fielder, a local pharmacist, and Charles Randolph Darden, a local photographer) of the

Democratic Party movement among black people of Meridian. It should be noted that prominent black people were Republicans of the Abraham Lincoln stripe because he freed the slaves. They had no function in any of the political process. In fact the only functioning political party in the state was the Democratic Party which at that time was not admitting any black people. With the help of William L. Dawson of Illinois and Clarence Mitchell of the NAACP, Albert and his compatriots started the process of registering black voters in the 1950's. These activities merited him many honors of which he was very proud and displayed prominently in his home. The list includes:

- a. Invitations to the inaugural festivities for Presidents Truman in 1949 and President Kennedy in 1961.
- b. Several Mayors of Meridian paid tribute to him for work with schools and other city activities.
- c. He was honored by the Meridian Chamber of Commerce.

He was a prominent player in the 1960's when the Freedom bus riders came to Meridian and was a participant in the famous Selma to Montgomery march. When white college students came to the south to help with voter registration in an organization called COFO, the Council of Federated Organizations, he fed and provided lodging for them despite threats of the Ku klux Klan and the White Citizens Council. Dr. A. L. Fielder gave them office space above his Drugstore, despite bomb threats. Some of this episode is documented in a book titled Three Lives For Mississippi by William Bradford Huie. Some of what was edited out of Huie's book was that as the three COFO workers who were lynched in 1964 ate at Albert's restaurant, their movements and activities were reported to the Klan by the bakery

delivery man right up to the day they were killed. That delivery man never delivered to Albert's place after that day according to testimony of his wife who worked there every day it was open from the 1940's to the 1970<sup>1</sup>'s when they retired and closed the place.

7. In 1985 when he was 80 years old William Albert Jones II took his own life. It is true that he had begun to have some health problems, that are not entirely unexpected for a man of his years, but they were not life threatening. The feeling among his closest survivors is that he was tired and ready to go, and true to form even with risks calculated he was a decisive man of action. Ten years later, even though many of his generation have passed, W. Albert Jones is still revered and honored in Meridian, Mississippi.

*1/ Jones' store was closed in February 1973.*