

“Through this exhibit, I’m celebrating togetherness and remembering times when my family and the community were the closest.”

My great-grandmother, Myrtle E. Lockett, youngest of 18 siblings, and Maud O. Lockett, her sister, traveled to Washington State from Canton, Mississippi. Myrtle bought her first home at 15th and L. Street in Hilltop. She lived in that home for more than thirty years. She lived through generations and had grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Her children are Laura M. Thurman and Harry K. Thurman.

During their lives, my great-grandmother, great-aunt, and grandmother looked for opportunities to build their lives in areas of employment that took them to non-traditional places. Myrtle worked at Boeing and Ft Lewis Laundry. Maude also worked at Boeing, Tacoma Goodwill Industries, and as a seamstress.

My grandmother was Laura, her life work included social service work, working as a seamstress, and helping her community through a non-profit organization. Some of those organizations included The Community Counseling Center, Safe Streets, Community Action Center, The Tacoma Urban League, and Bold Thrust, a social service non-profit organization. My great-uncle, Harry K. Thurman, was a recognized, prolific artist from Tacoma and Seattle. She raised seven children: David, Bettie Ann, Antonié(Tonie), Angela, Darryel, Carroll, and Donald. My family lived in Tacoma in Hilltop for most of the children's formative years at South 23rd and G. Street as well as so 16th and K St. now Martin Luther King Jr. Way in Tacoma.

My family is musically talented and my grandmother along with friends from the community created a show band. The band members were Laura’s children Darryel, Angela, Tonie, Bettie, and Carroll. Some of the community members in the band were James Wilkens, Mike Stewart, and Don Caswell. Over time the group evolved and had several different names including Natural Soul, Rhaw Syncopation, and The Neal Sisters. The group played for churches, colleges, community events, and fundraisers. Tonie, an extraordinarily gifted soloist, and lead singer of the family band had an extensive musical career of her own. She directed the Martin Luther King Jr. singers of Ft Lewis Washington for over 10 years. Tonie was a member of the Stadium Madrigal singers and received outstanding awards for her talent and influence as a singer and musician.

Some of the schools my aunts and uncles attended were Central Elementary, Stanley Elementary, McCarver Junior High School, Stadium High School, Mt. Tacoma High School, Garfield High School, Evergreen State College, Tacoma, and Tacoma Community College.

Our family lived, worked, played, and attended schools in Hilltop. My sisters, and I spent our younger years being raised in Hilltop by way of our great-grandmother. Myrtle Lockett, the oldest member of the family passed away at the age of 95, and her daughter my grandmother Laura passed away at the age of 96.

In the process of life, some of my grandmother’s children moved away from Hilltop and had families of their own. Even my mom, Bettie Ann, and my father, Matthew moved away from Hilltop however they were so rooted in the community it was the place my mom physically and instinctively called home. Because of this strong connection, my family stayed attached to this special place through family and community interactions for many years. Our unique ties to Hilltop, like many other families, created an interconnected legacy of faith in God, family connections, creative community involvement, advocacy, work ethic, and educational contributions for generations to come.