

Roscoe Reporting

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Young Leon in Anne Moody's 'Coming of Age in Mississippi'

Memories of his life shared by
his daughter, Karena McClain

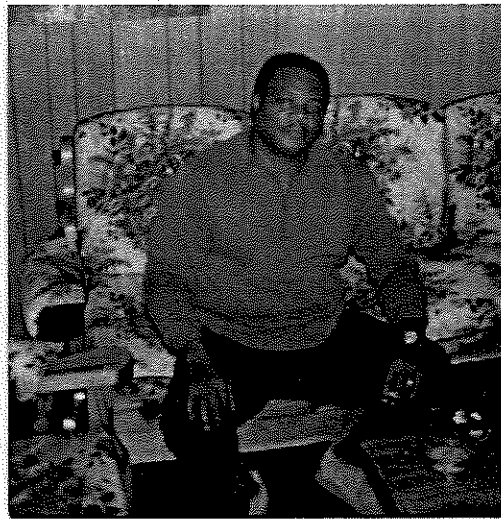
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#AnneMoody

#ComingOfAgeinMississippi



Arthur Leon Walker
(1944 -- 2004)

Arthur Leon Walker, who was known simply as Leon, was the boy who witnessed the shooting of Emma in Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. He also grew up to become a hard-working man who cared deeply about his family, according to his daughter, Karena McClain.

McClain, a licensed practical nurse in southwest Mississippi, spoke recently about the memories of her father.

Leon was born in 1944 in Woodville, Miss. He died of a heart attack on Moody's birthday – September 15, 2004.

McClain said her father was born Arthur Leon Walker, and at some point, he changed his last name to Davis, the name that appears on his death certificate.

McClain said she grew up as a Davis. She remembers her father telling her and his other seven children about his name being mentioned in Moody's book.

"That's how I learned about the book," McClain said. "He had the book and he would show it to us. He would say he was in the book. He specifically told us where he was mentioned and where Wilbert, the husband of Emma's sister, was trying to get inside the house. As Emma and her sister tried to hold the door shut from the inside, Wilbert shot through the door from the outside. He ended up shooting Emma's toe off."

In Chapter 17 of her book, Moody writes about Leon in the aftermath of the shooting:

"I walked up on Janie's porch as if I was treading on an earthquake. The door hanging on its bottom hinge made the house look like it was collapsing and I got the feeling I was collapsing with it. Inside the kitchen, all five of Janie's children stood with their eyes fixed on the pool of coagulating blood. I had never seen so much blood before; I noticed fragments of flesh and shattered bone mixed with it. Leon, the oldest boy, was crying. The younger ones appeared to be in a trance, "Let's put them to bed, Leon," I said. After I helped him do that, we cleaned up the blood together.

"Her whole foot, Essie Mae – her whole foot is gone, shot to pieces," Leon said, still crying.

Moody and Leon stayed up through the night drinking black coffee and trying to make sense of everything. She left the house around 7 a.m. the next day.

At seven that morning, I left Leon sitting before a cup of black coffee. I still remember his trembling hands as he motioned to thank me, his red swollen eyes, the tight lines across his forehead, and his nervously shaking feet. He looked like an old worried man with a twelve-year-old frame.



Karena McClain, L.P.N.
Daughter of Leon

As a child in the 1980s, McClain actually saw Emma's foot. Emma was her great-aunt, she said, adding she was the sister of her dad's mother. Although Emma had recovered from the shooting, she still seemed to carry some anger about it.

"She took her shoe off, and as she did, she said, 'That son of a bitch shot my toe off,'" McClain recalled. "She always looked at her foot. The gunshot appeared to have damaged her heel too."

Wilbert, the shooter, was Leon's step-dad, according to McClain. His full name was Wilbert Mealey Sr. He died, she said, in November 2004 and is buried in Cedar Rest Cemetery in Woodville.

McClain said Leon should be remembered as a provider for his family. "That's one of his main strengths," she said, adding he also liked to play sports. He loved softball and he was a "great basketball player" at Wilkinson County High School, she said. "People said that had he graduated high school, he could have gotten a scholarship and gone on to the NBA. He was that good."

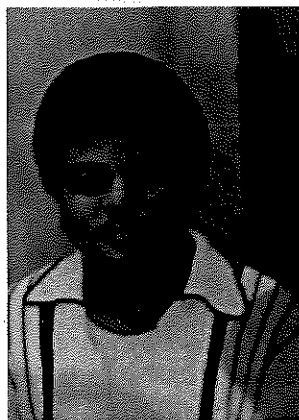
McClain's father worked for many years a saw operator in the saw mills. As for her own career, he always wanted her to become a nurse.

"I want you to go to school and be a nurse," he used to say. But McClain initially wanted to be a police officer or state trooper. However, things changed one day when she was at Emma's house. It was when the home health nurse came to see her. "That's when I knew what I wanted to do," McClain said. "I had a passion to help people who can't help themselves."

When Leon became ill, she became his nurse. "I helped him with his finances and cooked meals for him," she said. "He was a big eater."

On Sept. 15, 2015, McClain wrote about her father in a Facebook post:

"As I was sitting at the computer at work this morning, I saw the date and said to myself... Sept. 15th that's the day my daddy passed away. Then I looked at the time 5:21 a.m. I said and it was around this time I got the call. R.I.P. Daddy ... We love you!!!! #MyDaddy #MyTwinLilLeon #TheReasonIamOneToughCookie



Arthur Leon Walker

For more information:

See the Anne Moody page [here](#). Questions about the Anne Moody History Project may be directed to Roscoe Barnes III, Ph.D. via email at doctorbarnes3@gmail.com or roscoebarnes3@yahoo.com. For updates on Anne Moody history and the on-going work of this community service project, simply follow this blog or follow AMHP on Twitter ([@AnneMoodyHP](#)). [#ComingOfAgeinMississippi](#)