

A Commitment to Sharing with Others

McGregor Independent Resident, Leon Walker shares his experiences – 90 years young!

From raising chickens on the family farm to working in his father's community grocery store to helping at-risk children around the country, Mr. Leon Walker has committed his life to sharing with others.

Leon was born on October 19, 1931, in Cleveland, OH. He was the youngest of five brothers and sisters, each of whom was older than him by at least 15 years. Because of this age gap, he spent most of his earlier years playing with friends in his neighborhood.

In 1938, Leon's 76-year-old grandmother from Florida came to live with Leon's family. Leon's grandmother played a tremendous role in Leon's life because she brought him to Wednesday night church services every week, where Leon learned to make the world a slightly more beautiful place by making music. While he did not go on to have a career in music, Leon was passionate about singing. Throughout his life, Leon sang in an acapella classical music choir, a glee club, a gospel group, and in the home with his wife and children.

Then, in 1939, Leon's father purchased a farm in Jefferson, OH and began building a house for his family on the property. By 1941, the whole family was able to move into the five-bedroom house, where Leon spent his teenage years raising his family's chickens.

When he was 13 years old, Leon's brothers were all shipped off to fight in World War II. Too young to fight himself, Leon stayed home to help his father on the farm and to work in the family business at his father's new grocery store. Leon's father was a strong believer that "there's nothing a black man can't do," and hired Leon and several other young black men to work in the grocery store during the years of the war. It was here that Leon learned the importance of working hard and caring for the people in his community.

To this end, Leon sought out a stronger education than what he was receiving in Jefferson and began taking a bus to Cleveland every day to attend school. While attending school in Cleveland, he learned the pleasure of reading to learn about the world and about his place in the world.

While receiving this education, Leon's friends introduced him to Jeanne, the woman who would soon become his wife. Following their marriage, Leon and Jeanne had five children, each of whom Leon taught the value of "enriching their lives by reading and sharing with others" to make their community a slightly better place for everyone.

While Leon had very little money as a father, he made a mark on this world by ensuring that his children could go to one of the best schools in Cleveland. He ended up having to work two or three jobs at a time in various places around the city to afford to pay for the tuition of all five of his children through college. Directly inspired by their father, Leon's children went on to do things such as serve in the Navy, work as a manager, design, and construct buildings throughout the country, help children as a speech-language pathologist, or inspire others through teaching, writing books, and presenting as a public speaker.

Today, Leon lives at McGregor Senior Living in Cleveland, OH, where he prepares his own meals, exercises every day to stay in good shape and keep from aching, and experiences camaraderie with other seniors living in the Home. Leon's apartment is filled with pictures of his family, paintings created by his late wife, Jeanne, and countless books that he has read or plans to read in the future to continue to cultivate knowledge to share with the other people in his life.

Leon and Jeanne used much of their time volunteering to help at-risk children in Northeast Ohio. While Jeanne passed away several years ago, Leon hopes to carry on her legacy by donating much of their money to charities that help at-risk children across the country.

"I have seen lots of progress throughout my life, but we still need to make more if we are to improve this world for the better," Leon concluded. Leon spends his days actively contributing to this progress by mentoring his children, his grandchildren, and volunteers who have come to serve the residents of McGregor Senior Living in the wisdom that he has acquired throughout his rich life of sharing with his community.