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Personal Story

Nominee: Randolph Edward (Sonny) Camper, Sr.

Randolph Edward "Sonny" Camper, Sr. was born in Port Norris, NJ on October 20, 1936 and died on June, 1979.

He was survived by his now deceased parents Charles Amos "Mule" Camper and Maria Ellen Camper-Ennals and sons Randolph Edward "Randy" Camper, Jr. and Charles Harden.

He attended Brown School, served our country as a Private in the United States Army. The church he affiliated was the John Wesley Methodist Church.

His employment history included Riggins & Robbins Clam Company, as well as, other oyster packing companies in the area. For years, he was a truck driver for Dagastine's Transfer Company.

"Sonny" tragically died as a result of an accidental drowning while working as a NJ Delaware waterman. On July 24, 1955, his mother's brother, Kermit Waters lost his life in the same manner.

His parents were part of the exodus of African-American families who participated in the phenomena called the "Great Migration". By the end of the third decade of the twentieth century when a massive economic depression slowed the movement north, a half a million African-Americans had abandoned the region of their birth.

By 1930, more than 1.3 million resided outside the South. During that period, the Port Norris, NJ area was considered the "Oyster Capital of the World".

Although the Eastern shore of Maryland is nationally known for its' seafood industry, there was a lack of work at that time. His parents migrated to the Port Norris area from the Eastern Shore of Maryland in search of employment and to build a more productive way of life. The Port Norris, NJ area attracted them because it offered a similar type of seafood industry. They could utilize the skills they brought with them from Maryland in the way of harvesting and processing oysters, clams and crabs. As time progressed, the Port Norris communities of Shellpile and Bivalve became populated by many families from Maryland, Virginia and other southern states.

In conclusion, "Sonny's" ancestors confronted their challenges with courage and demonstrated what a strong work ethic and determination could accomplish. Economically, they were able to provide a better lifestyle for their families. They became first-time homeowners, advanced the education of their children, and made a positive impact on the new community they called home.