



## **World War II Veteran and Santa Rosa Deacon: Jesse Love**

Jesse Love was an incredible and resilient man. He was among the first African Americans to live in Santa Rosa, a veteran, and one of the founding members of The Community Baptist Church. Mr. Love was born in Grace, Mississippi in 1922 and grew up in Greenville. He was enlisted in the Navy in 1939 and lived in many places before being transferred to Santa Rosa. He dreamed of being a mechanic, but the limited opportunities for African Americans at the time proved his only option was to cook and clean in the messman's corps. Love was stationed in numerous locations, including Hawaii in 1941. On the morning of December 7, 1941, the 19-year-old was serving as a cook at Ford Island Naval Air Station, inside Pearl Harbor. He and others were in their bunks in the bachelor's officer's quarters when they started hearing gunfire. Soon after, when they began to hear the blasts of bombs and torpedoes, three injured men were rushed into the quarters. Love helped wrap the horribly burned young American soldiers in clean linens while hearing the explosions and cries for help. Following the attack, Love was transferred aboard a ship to the South Pacific where he saw several battles before being transferred back to the states.

Mr. Love was transferred to the Santa Rosa Auxiliary Air Station southwest of Santa Rosa in 1942. Soon after, he met his wife Victoria Ruth Love. Upon his honorable discharge from the Navy in 1945, the two settled in the city. Once discharged, he worked at Barlas Feed Company for 14 years, until working at Sonoma County Hospital (now Sutter Hospital) for 24 years. During most of his time at the hospital, he worked as Chief Housekeeper. Although treated better here than in Mississippi, Love was still subject to discrimination. Being the only Black man living in a housing complex on 3rd Street, Jesse was evicted and told he just didn't "fit in" with the rest of the people. He and his wife moved around a lot until finding their home on Grand Avenue, where they would stay for the rest of their lives.

On one Sunday afternoon in 1951, Reverend Washington E. Boyce and Reverend Dotson knocked on Love's door inviting him on their mission to organize the Community Baptist Church. After consideration, Love joined the mission and began worshiping with them at Native Sons Hall in Santa Rosa a few months after their first meeting. The following year, Love became the second Black deacon ordained in California.

Community Baptist Church holds the history of the Black community of Santa Rosa. Reverend Washington E. Boyce was originally rejected for his idea to start the church but persisted because he felt it was needed. Indeed, it was. The church made people look at each other differently, as it exposed the Santa Rosa community to new ways of thinking. Love said he



thought it exposed the community to what people of his race stood for: education and spirituality.

Beyond the church, Mr. Love was known around California and beyond for his work and chaplaincy with several veterans' associations, including Theodore Roosevelt Post No. 21 of the American Legion. He was a charter member of the Santa Rosa-based Chapter 23 of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, and Free & Accepted Masons.

Jesse Love was an incredibly resilient man. He passed away in 2013, leaving behind a legacy of kindness, wisdom, generosity, and love. His legacy is ingrained into Santa Rosa's history, and the community will forever benefit from his work.

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