

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Waverly Person

PERSON

Person, Waverly, 1926-

Alternative Names: Waverly Person;

Life Dates: May 1, 1926-February 10, 2022

Place of Birth: Blackridge, Virginia, USA

Residence: Boulder, CO

Work: Denver, CO

Occupations: Geophysicist

Biographical Note

Geophysicist and seismologist Waverly Person was born in Blackridge, Virginia on May 1, 1926 to Bessie Butts and Santee Person. Person grew up as the third of twelve children and helped on the family farm. For high school, he attended the Saint Paul Normal and Industrial School, the high school associated with the historically black Saint Paul's College in Lawrenceville, Virginia. In 1944, he was drafted into the U.S. Army as a high school senior, and Person served in the Pacific during World War II and in the Korean War. In the Army, he was promoted seven times to achieve the rank of first sergeant and received the Good Conduct Medal and the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal. After his honorable discharge in 1951, he returned to Saint Paul's College and received his B.S. degree in mathematics. Person met Sarah Walker during college and they married in 1954.

Person worked as a physical science technician for the Department of Agriculture before being transferred to the Department of Commerce as a seismic monitoring technician. He became interested in geophysics while he was working and started attending American University and George Washington University. Person became a qualified geophysicist in 1965, but he remained a technician due to racism. He was finally hired as a federal geophysicist and he transferred to the United States Geological Survey's National Earthquake Information Center in Golden, Colorado in 1971. Person worked his way up and became the first African American chief scientist in 1977, where he remained until his retirement in 2006.

Person was often sought out by national and international media as an earthquake spokesperson. He received an honorary doctorate in science from St. Paul's College, the

Outstanding Government Communicator Award, the Meritorious Service Award from the United States Department of the Interior, and the Annual Minority Award from the Community Services Department in Boulder, Colorado. He was active with the Seismological Society of America, Boulder County Crimestoppers, and Flatirons Kiwanis Club.

Waverly Person was interviewed by the The HistoryMakers on June 19, 2002.

Person passed away on February 10, 2022, at the age of 95.

Related Entries

National Earthquake Information Center [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1962 to ?]

National Earthquake Information Center [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1977 to ?]

Director