

Caleb Wilburn Caldwell, Jr.

Author: Yvonne Giles,
Research Consultant

Places: Georgetown, Scott County,
Kentucky; Lexington, Fayette County,
Kentucky

Birth: June 20, 1961

Death: September 28, 2019

Professions: Van Driver



Birth and Family

Caleb Wilburn Caldwell, Jr. was one of seven children born to parents Caleb Wilburn, Sr. and Imogene Beal Caldwell.

Caldwell married and was the father of Caleb Wilburn Caldwell, III.

Childhood Involvement

Caldwell went to work with his father when he was a second grader, about seven or eight years of age. During his oral history interview in 2019, he spoke quietly and calmly, the same way he talked around horses. These skills and knowledge were taught to him by his father, Caleb Wilburn Caldwell, Sr. He was a groom at Dodge Stables/Castleton Farm. About 1971, when Caldwell was in the third or fourth grade, the family moved to Delaware, Ohio where his father worked at Emerald Farm. They returned to Kentucky two years later.

Changing Direction

In 1977, Caldwell's father made a career change. He started driving for Sallee Horse Vans. The van company, established in 1963, only hires people who have had experience in handling horses. Because Caldwell had been mentored by his father, he too, had the experience needed. He started driving for the van company after high school in 1980.

Caldwell transported Thoroughbreds, Saddlebreds, Mustangs, Clydesdales and their handlers throughout the United States. He was especially cautious when loading Clydesdales, some of which weigh up to 2,200 pounds. Caldwell made sure they did not step on his feet. He said that most of the stallions and mares are accustomed to being loaded in a van. Sometimes the high-strung stallions would resist entering the van. They required firm help to load.

Transporting Winners

Caldwell shared memories of transporting winning Thoroughbreds. Sunday Silence, the 1989 Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes, was retired in 1991. The stallion was sold to a breeder outside the United States. Caldwell picked up the Thoroughbred from Stone Farm in Paris, Kentucky. Sunday Silence was transported to John F. Kennedy Airport in New York for a flight to a new home in Japan.

In 1996, Thoroughbred Cigar won the Breeder's Cup Classic held in Toronto, Canada. Following the race, Cigar was retired. Caldwell brought the stallion to Kentucky where Cigar spent his remaining days at the Kentucky Horse Park Hall of Champions.

Caldwell recalled loading Thoroughbreds that won Kentucky Derbies at Churchill Downs in Louisville. He delivered them to the nearby airport for flights to Maryland. They were entered to run in the Preakness Stakes, the second event of the United States Triple Crown races.

One of his last and most memorable trips was to Washington, D.C. in 1998. Caldwell transported the Kentucky Horse Park's Mustang Troop to President Bill Clinton's second inauguration. Caldwell took photos showing the gathering and parade. Caleb W. Caldwell, III, his son, who was about six years old, was there watching it all.

After eighteen years driving for Sallee Horse Vans, Caldwell decided it was time for a change. He resigned from the company.

Pride and Legacy

Caldwell admitted that working with horses was a seven day a week occupation. They require constant care. Money wise it is not a good living. He thought he was underpaid. But that was offset by the pride of doing the work. He enjoyed traveling, going through all the cities and states and out of the country.

Caldwell took pride also in the fact that his son has followed the same path that he and his father had taken. Working with horses is challenging but it is also rewarding.¹

Sources

Caldwell, Caleb Wilburn, Jr., interview by Karen Lanier. July 27, 2019, Chronicle of African Americans in the Horse Industry Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries.

<https://kentuckyoralhistory.org/ark:/16417/xt76km6231pkx>

Footnotes

¹Caldwell, Caleb W. Jr. 2019 Chronicle of African Americans in the Horse Industry Oral History Project.