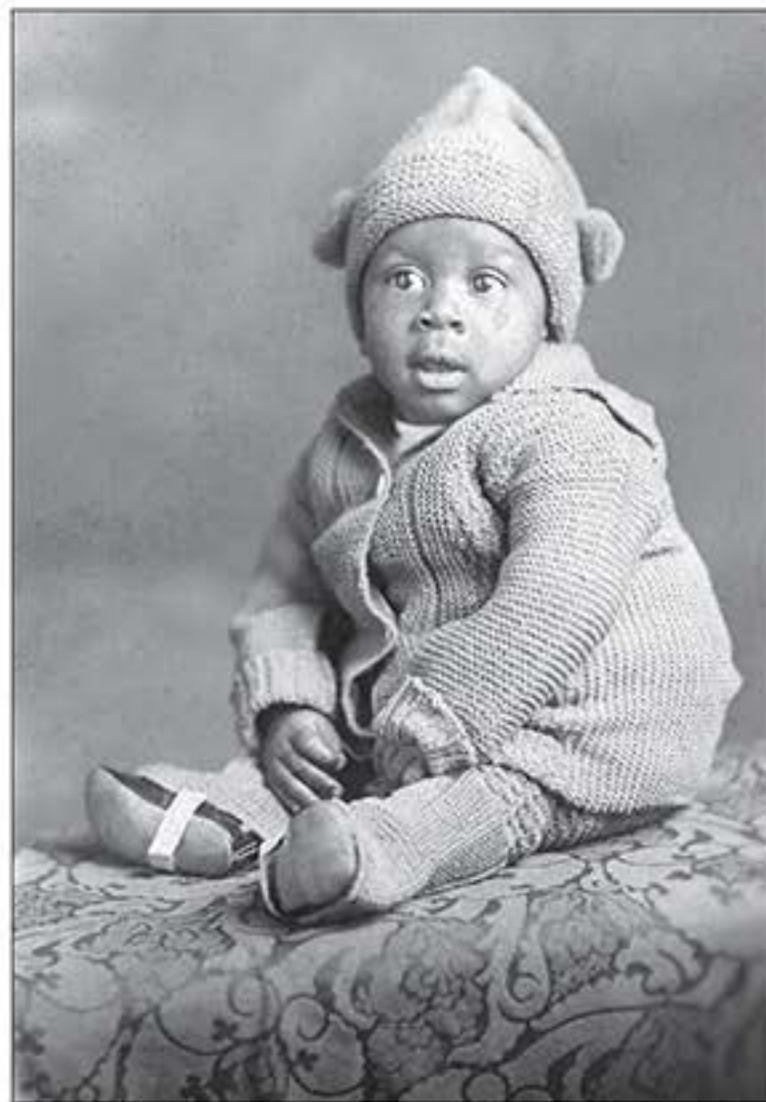


PART 1

Cornelius Casimere





Cornelius Casimere Sr. and Myrtle Daniels on their wedding day in 1925.

✧ BEGINNINGS ✧

I was born March the 21st, 1926, at a home that my dad had at 1811 Woolsey Street in Berkeley. I was born with the help of a midwife, and after I was born, she notified the doctor. The doctor came and checked me out and cleared the path for me to stay there at the house, so I didn't have to go to the hospital at all.

So far as I can remember, we lived at 1811 Woolsey Street for just a short time, and then we started moving around. My dad was a railroad person and he was always gone. He wanted to maneuver and get a place that would be close to his mother or his mother-in-law. So we moved around a 'lil bit there, as I'm told, in my early days.



My dad, Cornelius Lewis Casimere Sr., was born in New Orleans, Louisiana on February 22, 1891. My mother, Myrtle Daniels, was born, I think, just outside of a little town called Marshall, Texas, in 1908.

Dad came to California in 1919, during World War I. He was concerned about getting out of Louisiana, and this was an opportunity for him to go, even though he was a little older than the younger guys that were going off to war. But he took advantage of

the opportunity to get out of Louisiana, so he volunteered for the Army. It took him as far as France, and he stayed there until it was time for him to come back.

He was so happy to be out of Louisiana that when he came home, he didn't want to come back to Louisiana except to see his folks and then leave again. The ship brought him into Washington State from overseas, and Dad caught a train from Washington, going down the coast through Oregon and California and then on around into Texas and Louisiana. During that train ride, he just checked around different places to see about job opportunities, because he didn't have any at home in Louisiana.

He checked Oregon, and when he got to California, he found out the train company was hiring Pullman porters. He inquired, and they told him it was a possibility, but he had to come on back in a certain length of time. So he went on home to Louisiana, greeted his mother and his siblings, and then he packed his bag and came back to California. And it was true: he was able to

“Behind almost every successful African American, there is a Pullman porter.”*

The Pullman Company is also remembered for its porters. While still a menial job in many respects, it offered better pay and security than most jobs open to African Americans at the time, in addition to a chance for travel, and was a well regarded job in the African-American community. Pullman porters were unionized in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters under A. Philip Randolph. At one time, the Pullman company was the largest employer of African Americans in the U.S.

– *Wikipedia*

Berth attendant was one among many hats the Pullman porter wore. He was official greeter, helping passengers climb aboard and lugging up their baggage, then doing the reverse when they left. He was a chambermaid, endlessly dusting cinders from window ledges and seats, then using mop and whisk-

get a job as Pullman porter.

A Pullman porter was a person on the train who took care of the first class passengers. They had chair cars and they had Pullman cars, sleepers, so there were separate quarters. He was responsible for this whole car; I guess there were 10 or 12 set-ups. In the daytime, he set it up as a living room. He pulled all the chairs down to sit in, and at night, he folded a certain number of chairs up to make beds out of them. I think there must have been about 10 or 12 rooms in each car, and Dad had two cars. That was his job, and that was his only job after he got out of the service that I can recall him talking about.



After he met and married Myrtle, my mother – she was only 17 or 18, and he was about 35 – they were only together for

broom to sweep grime off washrooms, passageways and platforms. Spittoons had to be polished, ladies' hats boxed, shoes shined, letters mailed and telegrams wired, heaters stoked, lights lit and extinguished, Quiet signs posted then removed, card tables set up and broken down, and coolers stocked with ice. The porter served food and drinks on dining and hotel cars, and sold cigarettes, candy and playing cards everywhere Pullmans ran.

– *www.aliciapatterson.org*

In the late 19th through the early 20th century, the young African American laborer who, while working as a porter (but also as a dining car waiter, fireman, brakeman, maid or cook) for the Pullman Rail Car Company was the true harbinger of the Civil Rights movement and the precursor to today's black middle class.

– *Maria Fish, SFGate, July 4, 2004*

* *Larry Tye, Rising from the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class, 2004*



Myrtle Daniels Casimere. Berkeley, 1920s.

a little over a year. After she had me, Mother got tuberculosis, I guess, and was unable to make it. She died six months after I was born, so I never really knew her. I only know what my grandparents and my father told me about her.

Her parents, Jack and Carrie Daniels, started out in Texas. They came out to California after World War I was settled, in the early 1920s, when Myrtle was just a girl. Jack Daniels had a job in Texas but got injured on the job. They didn't have any way of pensioning a person; they'd give him a certain amount of money and send him on his way. He didn't have any recourse, not in Texas at that time.

So he came to California and brought his wife and his daughter, my mother. My mother stayed with her parents until she was 17, and that's when she met my father.

I don't know how my parents met – probably in church! *[laughs]* Our family was always going to church. That's how I met my wife, so I'm sure that's how he met his, at church! *[laughs]*

In those days, my dad was a Baptist. He was active when he was home; he'd sing in the choir and do little things he could do.