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# Stampede's Edwin Harrison II reconnects with grandfather in The Crash

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Football led Edwin Harrison II to the CFL, and ultimately, his roots.

The journey of the Calgary Stampede's tackle and his family to re-establish a connection with Calvin Jones, a former Winnipeg Blue Bombers offensive lineman who died tragically in a plane crash, is chronicled in "The Crash." It's the latest instalment in the TSN series "Engraved on a Nation" and premieres Friday night at 8 p.m. ET.

Jones grew up in Steubenville, Ohio, and was a standout player at the University of Iowa, twice being named an all-American and winning the Outland Trophy as U.S. college football's top lineman. He also became the first African-American to be featured on the cover of Sports Illustrated.

Jones was a fifth-round selection of the Detroit Lions but instead headed north to play for Winnipeg. He performed so well as a rookie he was invited to participate in the CFL all-star game in 1956, helping the West defeat the East 35-0 at Vancouver's Empire Field.

He was scheduled to leave B.C. the morning after but overslept and was forced to take a later flight. But that plane crashed into Mt. Slesse near Chilliwack, B.C., killing all 62 aboard. Jones, 23, and four other CFL players — Mel Becket, Mario DeMarco, Gordon Sturtridge and Ray Syrnnyk — were among those on the flight.

However, football is a subplot in "The Crash," written and directed by Paul Cowan. The underlying theme of the powerful, hour-long documentary is family and how two were affected indirectly by the game and reconnected again, in part, by it.

It was at Iowa that Jones met Sandra Lee and she became pregnant. But shortly afterwards, Lee's family took her back and she never saw or spoke to Jones again. Lee's mother, however, wrote Jones when he was in Winnipeg informing him of the birth of his son but Jones never responded.

After Jones died in the crash, Lee's parents adopted their grandchild for fear that Jones' family might make a custody claim.

But the story doesn't end there.

The two families eventually become friendly and talk about getting together to allow the boy, Edwin Harrison, to meet his father's side of the family. But Edwin Harrison is unsure.

"I don't know if I really wanted to find out more about his family because I was afraid of the way they may perceive me," he says in the documentary.

The meeting eventually takes place, thanks in large part to the efforts of Harrison's son, Edwin II, after he begins delving into his family's past and finds he wants to learn more about his grandfather.

"Getting married has made me realize that family is the most, one of the important things we have in life and our family has always been close," Edwin Harrison II says. "There has always been this one big hole which was Calvin Jones.

"I didn't start thinking about Calvin until I got to high school when football became serious in my life and that's when I started to really ask questions. Once I found out all the amazing things that he had done in such a short period of time that he did then, I just had to know more. My grandfather could've been the greatest offensive lineman ever to touch the football field, no doubt."

But the six-foot-three, 305-pound Calgary Stampeder makes it clear he learned much about the crash that took Jones' life on his own.

"I asked my dad about what he knew about the crash because I know there are a lot of things that we haven't discussed about Calvin," the 27-year-old Houston native said. "His response was, 'Not much.'"

"I didn't want to end up like my dad, afraid of his past, haunted by Calvin's ghost. I need to find out about the crash. I really feel it holds answers for me."

Bud Grant, the legendary former Bombers player and coach who also coached the NFL's Minnesota Vikings, was a teammate of Jones in Winnipeg and also participated in the '56 CFL all-star game, scoring two TDs. Jones was originally booked on the same return flight as Grant but Grant reveals he had to switch his teammate to a later flight when Jones couldn't make the earlier takeoff.

Edwin Harrison II learns from crash investigator Larry Vance his grandfather's flight encountered icy conditions and turbulence at about 16,000 feet but that the plane was designed to easily handle both. However, an engine fire left the aircraft with just three operating, a situation that was compounded by the buildup of ice that resulted in slowing it down.

After deciding to drop altitude, the pilot opts to turn around and return to Vancouver.

"Now the controller says to him, 'The next thing I want you to do altitude-wise is report Vancouver at 8,000 feet,' " Vance says. "When the controller said to them 8,000 feet, it doesn't mean that they have to go to 8,000 feet but if you go through the transcript carefully you could make a case for them thinking, 'We're OK to go to 8,000 feet.'"

OK to go to 8,000 feet?"

But Edwin Harrison II isn't content with knowing these facts. He decides he wants to visit the actual crash site.

"The more I find out about the crash, how my grandfather died, the more I want to visit his final resting place," he says. "I just feel like being in that place where he took his last breath, he saw his last sight will bring a lot of closure to my family."

So Harrison and his wife, Kishanda, make the trek on foot to Mt. Slesse and are seen sitting together at the commemorative site.

"It's amazing how Calvin has been a dividing force in our family and at the same time the same person, the same spirit is bringing us back together again," he says. "I think my dad would really appreciate this."

"I really have found out as much about Calvin as I am going to find out. It's not enough but it is enough for me. I've learned about family and I've learned a great deal about myself."

And the third-year CFL player hopes, one day, to be able to speak with his father about Calvin Jones.

"Calvin lives on in my dad, he lives on in me and maybe some day if I have kids of my own he'll live on in them to," Edwin Harrison II says. "I know I'll be in Houston soon enough and I know my dad is at home and we can sit down and we can talk about how his daddy died."

"We can talk about Calvin Jones and the legacy that he left, the life that he lived."

Edwin Harrison II certainly hasn't forgotten his grandfather. He changed his jersey number to 62 for the 2012 season to honour Jones, who wore No. 62 at Iowa.

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