

Lois J. Cross-Hart Biography

Lois J. Cross-Hart was born on June 27, 1934 in Little River, Michigan the oldest of eight children born to Clifford Charles Cross, a farmer, and Lela (Johnson) Cross, a homemaker. During her elementary years, Lois was reared in Mecosta County in the little town of Remus. As her father established himself in farming, the family was moved to a larger spread in Isabella County. It was there in Blanchard, Michigan Lois graduated from High School in 1952, having distinguished herself as a formidable athlete of exceptional beauty and self-confidence. Always surrounded by a loving, close-knit and god-fearing family, Lois took great pride in her African American, Native American and British ancestral heritage.



Bertha, her maternal grandmother whose mother and father emigrated from England, was a stalwart woman given to privacy, hard work, and peculiarity. Widowed and fiercely independent, she held a special affection for her eldest grandchild and Lois was greatly influenced by her. Lois fondly recalls occasions when wandering bands of Gypsies would be granted permission to camp on her grandmother's property. The young girl would take these occasions to sneak out of the house, and hidden in the distance, watch mesmerized as the women, beautifully bejeweled and arrayed in flowing garments, would dance around a moonlit campfire as their men played musical accompaniment.

On her father's side, her great-grandfather, Thomas Cross, was born in Louden County, Virginia as the son of an English plantation owner's daughter (Lee) and a Black plantation servant (Cross). As a young adult, he moved to Hocking County, Ohio where Thomas enlisted in the Army and served in the Colored Infantry during the Civil War. Not long after mustering out of the Army, Thomas and his young family, along with three other families, traveled by oxen and covered wagon to Remus, Michigan. This group would later be referred to as the "Old Settlers." In 1869 Thomas purchased forty acres of land from the Pier Marquette Railroad Company with the proceeds from the sale of two horses. Thomas cleared his land, built his home and a one room school which doubly served as a place of worship until Thomas furnished the needed monies to build the "Wheatland Church of Christ." Over one hundred and forty-five years old, the church remains a viable part of the Remus community yet today. Her grandfather, Amos Obadiah Cross, the youngest son of Thomas became a self-employed farmer. Later, he and his wife Mary added one hundred additional acres to their land and Amos would farm the land using horse-drawn teams.

It was the influence of her grandfather who instilled in Lois a love of poetry. Every Sunday, after church, the family would assemble at the old farmhouse. In the parlor, Grandpa Amos would take out his treasured books of the Old Masters and read aloud the works of Keats, Tennyson, and Shelley, who came alive with that booming baritone voice he possessed. The great African American Poet, Paul Lawrence Dunbar was a favorite which he read in dialect. Lois' poem "Papa" is a tribute to her grandfather Amos, and her poem "Then" is a tribute to her father Clifford.