

## Joe Louis Reliford's Honors and Awards



- Honored in the State Representative Chambers as World's Youngest Professional Baseball Player. – 1991
- Honored in A Joe Louis Reliford Day in Batesville Arkansas at an elementary school, after invitation by 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and class. – 1991
- Honored during the July 4<sup>th</sup> Freedom Fest sponsored by The Exchange Club, Douglas, GA. - 1992
- Received the NAACP Freedom Fund Award in Humanities. – 1992
- Honored as an Outstanding Citizen by Secretary of State Max Cleland. – 1992
- Given recognition for service as City Commissioner in Douglas, GA. - 1997
- Received the Afro-American Heritage Foundation Achievement Award-Ben Hill County. – 1998
- Honored at Fort Valley State College Celebration of Afro-American History Month-February. -1998
- Completed 18 years as a Deputy Sheriff of Coffee County. – 1998
- Honored as a mascot for the Fitzgerald Grand Homecoming Parade. -1999
- Honored at the Coffee County Museum of History. – 2002
- Honored at the Afro-American Negro- Baseball League Exhibition at the Afro-American Culture Library in Fort Lauderdale, FL. -2003

### \*\*\*\*HONORARY PALLBEARERS \*\*\*\*

THE DEACONS OF  
PLEASANT GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH



### \*\*\*\*ACTIVE PALLBEARERS \*\*\*\*

COLLIE BUCHANAN	BOBBY MCKENZIE
JAMES JONES	JARRELL RELIFORD
THADDEUS JONES	STEPMAN STEVENS



### \* \* \* Acknowledgements \* \* \*

Perhaps you sent a lovely card, or sat quietly in a chair. Perhaps you sent those beautiful flowers, that we saw sitting there. Perhaps you spoke the kindest words, as any friend could say. Perhaps you were not there at all, just thought of us that day. Whatever you did to console our hearts, We thank you for whatever part. The family of Mr. Joe L. Reliford Sr.

### \*\*\*\*COMMITTAL \*\*\*\*

**Douglas City Cemetery**

### \*\*\*\*REPAST \*\*\*\*

**Pleasant Grove Baptist Church**

## Celebrating the Life and Legacy of

# Deacon Joe L. Reliford Sr.

*"World's Youngest Professional Baseball Player"*



Sunrise  
November 11, 1939

Sunset  
May 2, 2022



**Saturday, May 7, 2022**

**11:00 A.M.**

**J.D. Murray Gymnasium**

**George Washington Carver Freshman Campus**

**1020 South Gaskin Avenue**

**Douglas, Georgia 31533**

**Presiding: Pastor Tommy Wells Jr.**

**Eulogist: Pastor Trevino Simpson**

**\*\*\*\*OBITUARY\*\*\*\***

**Joe Louis Reliford Sr.**

**Sunrise: Nov. 11, 1939**

**Sunset: May 2, 2022**

Those who knew Joe Louis Reliford knew that there were few people who loved and enjoyed life more than he did. His family was a source of great joy to him, and he tried to be a friend to everyone he knew. As a result, he made friends wherever he went. He was always willing to lend a helping hand to any friend or family member.

He loved traveling and was always ready to go to take his family places, to see things, and meet other people. He loved his hometown of Fitzgerald, Georgia and never missed an opportunity to return there, to visit everyone that he knew.

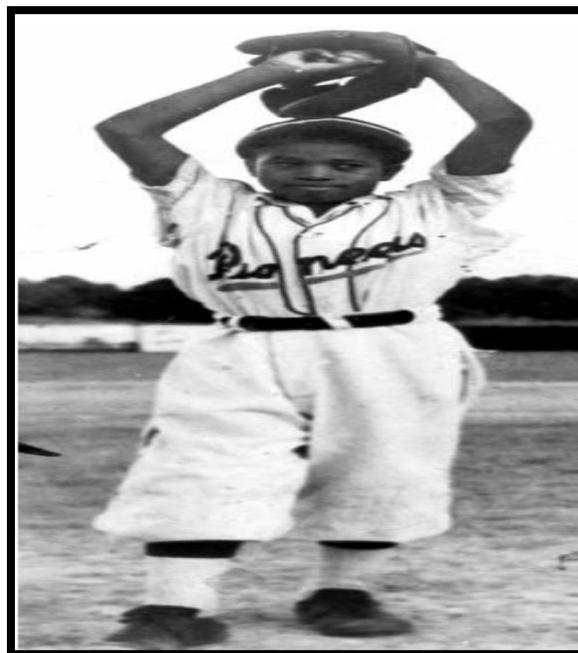
Joe Louis Reliford Sr. is the son of late Roscoe and Luronia Reliford. He was born in Ben Hill County, Fitzgerald, Georgia, November 29, 1929. Joe was born the 9<sup>th</sup> of ten children and was raised by his mother, after the passing of his father, when he was 3 years old. All of Joe's siblings preceded him in death: Willie Reliford, Sylvester Reliford, Osie Reliford, Essie Duehart, Clorine Young, Eula Lee Jones, Isiah Reliford, Lucy Members and Maxine Stickney. One grand-son, Jeremy Reliford Jr., also preceded him in death.

When Joe was younger, he was a member of Holsey Chapel Church in Fitzgerald. He graduated from Monitor High School, where he was very active in sports. Upon graduation he received training as a phonograph technician at Florida A&M University. He used his training for years working at Central Music Company in Fitzgerald and later, in Douglas Georgia, where he moved after marrying Gwendolyn Reliford. To this union three children were born. Joe joined Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Douglas, Ga. He was ordained a Deacon, under the leadership of Pastor Willie C. Mobley. He also served as Chairman Deacon for a few years. Joe was active in Pleasant Grove until his health failed.

Joe was one of the first two black police officers in Douglas. He later joined the Coffee County Sheriff Department, working as one of three black deputies. He spent the rest of his years, after retirement, working in various community services. Joe also served as a City Commissioner, in Douglas, for several years. Joe was also an active member of the Masons, in Douglas. He was also a member of the Kiwanis Club, in Douglas, where he served as President for several years, until his health failed.

He leaves to cherish his memory: A devoted and loving wife of 55 years: Gwendolyn Reliford. Children: Joel Reliford (Roneica), Vanessa Spivey, Jeremy Reliford (Tarenia), Jeannie Reliford-Whipple (Willie), Joe Reliford Jr. (Harriet), Bobby Reliford, Etreia Towns (Collis), Percilla Munford (Glenn) and Jeffery Dixon. Sister-in-laws: Pauline (Amos) Oliver, Lottie Buchanan and Bernita Buchanan, Linda (David) Arnold. Brother-in-law: Don (Daisy) Buchanan. He is also survived by a host of grandchildren, great grandchildren, nieces and nephews, cousins and and sorrowing friends.

All who knew him loved him deeply and will always cherish the memory of his presence on our lives.



**Joe Louise Reliford  
(Age 12)**

**“World’s Youngest Professional Baseball Player”**



**Joe and Gwendolyn Reliford  
55 years of marriage**



**\*\*\*\*PROGRAM\*\*\*\***

**Presiding: Pastor Tommy Wells Jr.**

**Music Raheem King**

**Processional Ministers & Family**

**Final Glimpse**

**Family Prayer Pastor Willie C. Mobley**

**SCRIPTURES:**

**Old Testament Pastor Virgil Scott Sr.**

**New Testament Pastor Connie K. Graham**

**Selection Darlene Jackson**

**Reflections Jimmy Turner  
Frank Jackson**

**Selection Trina Lee**

**Eulogy Pastor Trevino Simpson  
Pleasant Grove Baptist Church**

**Acknowledgements Harrell’s Funeral Home**

**Recessional**



## **"From Batboy to Hall of Fame"**

### **Joe Louis Reliford Jr.**

At the age of 12 years old, Joe served as the batboy for the Fitzgerald Pioneers, a professional league baseball team, during the summer of 1952. The Pioneers were in Statesboro, playing the Pilots. The game wasn't going so well, the score in the eighth inning was 10-0, in favor of the Pilots, so the fans started yelling, "Put in the batboy!" Pioneers Manager, Charlie Ridgeway, walked over to the dugout and said, Joe, get a bat, you're gonna pinch-hit for Ray Nicting. Joe went in, and began his journey, as the "Worlds' youngest professional baseball player. This record remains in "The Guinness Book of World Records" and "Ripley's Believe It or Not". A book has been written, entitled "From Batboy to Hall of Fame". He is also listed in Furman Bishops "Strange but True Baseball stories.

Prior to Joe's passing a contract was made with H2 Production of Los Angeles, CA to produce his Baseball story entitled "The Other Joe Louis." Because they were unable to attend today, this is what they sent.

Joe Louis Reliford will be remembered as a father, a husband, a brother, a sheriff, and a baseball hall of famer. Joe was born in Ben Hill County, Georgia, on November 29th, 1939 to Roscoe and Luronia Reliford. One of ten children, Joe and his family moved to Fitzgerald, leaving behind the sharecropping life. Atten years old, Joe became the batboy for the all-white baseball team, the Pioneers, to earn money to help out his mother. Two years later, Joe created a seminal moment in American history when he not only broke the color barrier in the Georgia State League but also became the youngest person to play in professional baseball at just 12 years old, paving the way for players like Hank Aaron, Willie McCovey, and Frank Robinson. In high school, Joe was named All American for football, baseball, and track and was recruited to Florida A&M for college. A family man, Joe married the love of his life Gwendolyn, and together they raised three children, Joel, Jeremy, and Jeannie, in the city of Douglas. Later in life, Joe became just the third black police officer in the city and

stayed an active part of the community and local church. Even starting a local semi-pro football team, The Douglas Tornados. Joe was always aware of how lucky he was, "My mother, my educators, and my wife are responsible for who I am. I've had a lovely life," he said. "I've been blessed. God has been good to me."

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