



## Joseph Parham Sr.

November 24, 1926 - March 19, 2024

JOSEPH PAUL PARHAM, SR. (known to many as “Joe”) was born on November 24, 1926, the son of James Samuel Downey (known to friends and family as “Sam”) and Mabel Parham.

Mabel had a sister, Margaret (“Maggie”) Parham, and a brother, Robert Parham. Mabel was a glass factory worker and then a housekeeper.

Sam had a brother, George Downey. Sam was a glass factory worker and also played in the Negro Baseball League.

Joe grew up in West Baltimore, off of Stricker Street. He had an older brother, Russell. Joe and his brother were raised primarily by their mother, Mabel. Sam later married Lottie King, who was a practical nurse; and Lottie (King) Downey became Joe’s step-mom.

(Later in life, Sam, Mabel and Lottie were referred to by grandchildren as “Pop Sam,” “Mom Mabel,” and “Mom Lottie.”)

Joe attended Frederick Douglass High School and graduated from Morgan State University with a bachelor degree in foreign languages (French and Spanish). At Morgan, Joe was a member of the Beta Sigma Tau Fraternity, and also began his lifelong love of tennis.

After college, Joe went into the Army as a 2nd Lieutenant, prepared by his participation in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program at Morgan. He went through basic training in Georgia (at Fort Benning, which was subsequently renamed Fort Moore), and also did a brief stint in Bakersfield, California. He was then stationed in Korea until his honorable discharge.

Joe met Camilla Marie Jordan at a Friday night dance sponsored by a coed youth group called Club Malekola. Camilla had grown up in a devout Catholic home and received her primary education under the tutelage of the Oblate Sisters of Providence (the first religious community of women of color in the United States). Camilla was greatly influenced by the Oblates and considered becoming a nun.

Joe and Camilla both happened to attend the Club Malekola dance. Joe was actually invited to the function by his girlfriend. But Camilla was tall, friendly and outgoing. In no time at all, Joe was walking Camilla and her two sisters (Helena and Irene) home from these functions. But his eye was on Camilla. Later he bought an engagement ring and asked Camilla if she would like to be his wife, or if she still wanted to be a nun. She chose Joe.

Joe and Camilla were married on June 12, 1954 at Saint Pius V Church on Schroeder Street.

Joe went to the University of Mexico for about two years, to further his studies in Spanish. While there, his oldest son (Joseph) was born in 1956. After returning to Baltimore, Joe began working in the Post Office. Shortly thereafter, he earned his Master's Degree from Middlebury College in Vermont.

In 1958, their 2nd son (Antonio) was born, and later that same year the Parham family moved into a house of their own on Monticello Road, where he resided for over 60 years. At that time, the Parham family also began attending St Cecilia's Church. Joe and Camilla became an integral part of the church and served in and led many of the church's committees and clubs—including the Boy Scouts Program.

In 1964, Joe started his teaching career at Lombard Middle School. In 1965, their 3rd son (David) was born. Joe stayed at Lombard for about 18 years, eventually becoming the Language Department Head.

Joe had a love for teaching -- and for tennis.

Joe and his family would travel the East Coast to many tennis tournaments where he (and later, his doubles partner, Stanley Turner) would win many trophies. He and his partner were members of the American Tennis Association (ATA), because they were not allowed to join the United States Tennis Association (USTA). (The ATA was formed to give black players a place to play and compete, since the USTA formally barred African-Americans from their competitions during those years.) Joe became a nationally top-ranked amateur Black tennis player, and the Parham home became filled with trophies and other tennis memorabilia.

Joe's love of tennis went beyond his own game, and he dedicated himself to teaching the next generation. He saw the game of tennis as reaching beyond the color lines of segregation and he helped to establish the Netmen Co-ed Tennis Club, one of the first Black tennis clubs in Baltimore.

Throughout the years, while traveling around Baltimore, Joe would be stopped by former Baltimore Public School students who had fond memories of their

time being taught a foreign language by him. Joe proudly remembered a time when a former student compared him to the teacher who was played by Sidney Poitier in the movie, "To Sir, With Love" (because of Joe's hard-but-fair teaching persona).

Joe concluded his teaching career as Head of the Language Department back at Douglass High School (which he had also attended as a high school student), retiring at the request of Camilla, who had already been retired for 10 years. After retiring, he spent his time with family, church, and tennis. He also joined the choir at St. Cecilia's Church, becoming a devoted member and soloist. He continued his love of teaching by tutoring Spanish to the children of family and friends.

In 2012, a few months before their 58th anniversary, Camilla transitioned to her eternal rest, after a long battle with illness.

In February 2018, the Roots of Scouting, Inc. named Joe a "Lifetime Community Service Awardee" and "African Heritage Honors Awardee" for his dedication and service to the community.

Even during the later stages of his life, Joe kept his mind sharp and body strong by being active in the church, playing and watching tennis, and teaching Spanish to adults at a senior citizens center.

On March 20, 2024, at the age of 97, he peacefully entered into his eternal rest.

He is pre-deceased by his wife Camilla, his brother Russell, his sister-in-law Irene Jordan Spears, his brother-in-law James W. Johnson, Jr., and his daughter-in-law Freda. He is survived by his three sons, Joseph Jr., Antonio and wife Lynda, David and wife Benita, sister-in-law Helena Jordan Johnson;

nine grandchildren (who called Joe “Pop-Pop”), Nicole, Melvina, Christopher, Robert, Judith, Ivan, Cree, Michael, and Jessica; eleven great-grandchildren, Emijah, Damani, Isaiah, Amaya, Aiyana, Christian, Analeigh, Jailynn, Aliza, Ian, Jaysen; one great-great-grandchild, Bryson; and a host of other relatives and friends.

# Cemetery Details

## Garrison Forest Veterans

11501 Garrison Forest Road  
Owings Mills, MD

# Previous Events

## Public Viewing

APR 9. 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM (ET)

March Funeral Homes - West Baltimore  
4300 Wabash Avenue  
Baltimore, MD 21215  
(410) 542-2400  
info@marchfh.com

## Wake

APR 10. 10:00 AM - 10:30 AM (ET)

Church of Saint Cecilia  
Winsor and Hilton  
baltimore, MD

## Funeral Service

APR 10. 10:30 AM (ET)

Church of Saint Cecilia  
Winsor and Hilton  
baltimore, MD



# Tribute Wall

MR

“ *Morgan, Steve and Judy (Wilson) Ringgold purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of Joseph Parham Sr..*



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**Morgan, Steve and Judy (Wilson) Ringgold** - April 07, 2024 at 07:13 PM



“ *We the March Family and Staff wish to extend our deepest and heartfelt sympathy in the passing of your loved one. Our prayers go out to you and your family in your time of loss. We know and understand that you have received many expressions of love and we will continue to lift you up in prayer. May the memories you cherish of brighter and happier days help to ease your sorrow and comfort you always.*

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**March Funeral Homes** - March 21, 2024 at 10:29 AM