



## Mr. Sam Polk

March 6, 1935 - September 17, 2021

Mr. Sam Polk, 86, of Peoria, Illinois transitioned to his heavenly home at 10:58 pm on Friday, September 17, 2021 at OSF St. Francis Medical Center, Peoria, IL.

Sam was born on March 6, 1935 in Memphis, Tennessee to proud parents, Charlie and Nellie Jane (Jones) Polk. Sam received his early education in the Memphis school system. Sam moved to the Peoria, IL area in the 1940's to attend Greenley and later, Woodruff High School. During that time, he was a Boy Scout at Carver Center, Troop 38, under the leadership of Mr. Frank Campbell; who became part of the inspiration of the life of service and character Sam demonstrated to date.

He was inducted into the US Army, March 15, 1955 honorably serving his country, including time spent in the US Army Reserves, until March 15, 1963. Sam worked and was Supervisor for the Peoria Public Works Department for over 45 years, retiring in 2002.

He began serving the Peoria community through the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) local branch. As Vice President, under the leadership of another noble and inspirational man, John Gwynn Jr., Sam advocated tirelessly for equal employment opportunities for minorities, justice, voting rights and overall basic human rights through

peaceful boycotts, demonstrations and organization. He volunteered and advocated for equality and had been a lifetime member of the NAACP since the 1950's.

He was a former member of the Henry Brown Lodge PHA and member of the Peoria Tri-County Urban League's Guild. Through the Tri-County Urban League, Sam was supportive of the city's youth and those in need, even after his daughter's involvement and departure to college, 20 years ago.

Tomorrow's Scientists, Technologists and Managers (TSTM) is a program Sam supported by chaperoning, attending meetings and donating time and finances through fundraising and directly, for children who were unable to financially participate in college visits and were otherwise in need.

Personally, and through the NAACP, Sam has also supported the Carver Center so that it may remain a community resource for children and adults alike. Having his back yard, literally behind Carver Center at one point, he understood the importance for citizens, camps and other programs for youth to have a safe facility in which to house their program in the community. In this vein, he participated on the committee to reopen the center after its 2011 closure by advocating for Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds to be allocated for the redevelopment and urban renewal efforts of Carver Center, which resulted in its reopening in 2013.

Since his retirement from the City of Peoria as a supervisor in 2002, he has mentored about a dozen young men. He has taught them work ethics, goal setting, financial management through stipends, decision making, character building, community involvement and skill development through apprenticeship opportunities.

Sam enjoyed being a behind the scenes supporter of worthy causes, people and organizations. He was always willing to give a hand to those willing to

take a step. Other notable organizations to which he contributed are the Heritage Ensemble, St. Martin De Porres Boy Scout Troop, local food pantries, Girl Scouts, St. Jude, Susan B Komen and of course, The Whitney M. Young Jr. annual events.

Sam had an amazing sense of humor. He loved jazz music, especially albums by Myles Davis. If there are any last words he would want to say, it would be GO VOTE!

Sam leaves to cherish his precious memory his loving and devoted wife of 47 years, Mrs. Jean A. Polk of Peoria, IL; two children, Kenneth Sam Polk, Sr., of Muskegon, MI and Celeste (Donald) Polk-Coverdell of Brandywine, MD; 5 grandchildren, Darnell, Kenneth, Jr.,(Tyeisha), Kevin, Sr.,(Jazmyn), Caleb and Donovan; 6 great-grandchildren, Skylar, Kailani, Kassadi, Kevin, Jr., Kennedi and Kaydence; 3 nieces, Jonelle (Daniel) McCloud, Rebecca Polk and Karen (Billy) Raymond; and a host of other relatives and many friends. He is preceded in death by his parents; one daughter, Sheryl Gulley; one brother, James Polk; one grandson, Jonathan and a nephew, Kevin Polk.

An evening visitation will be held from 5 pm – 7 pm, Wednesday, September 29, 2021 at Simons Mortuary.

Funeral services will be held at 11 am on Thursday, September 30, 2021 at Prince of Peace Baptist Church, with a visitation at 10am. The host Pastor is Rev. Simon J. Holly, Jr. Rev. Marvin Hightower, Pastor of Liberty Baptist Church will officiate and bring words of comfort to the family. In lieu of flowers, donations to the Peoria Chapter of the NAACP would be Sam's preference. Donations can be sent to PO Box 6002, Peoria, IL 61601 or via website at [www.naacppeoria.com](http://www.naacppeoria.com). Sam will be entombed at Resurrection Mausoleum where full US Army Military Honors will be rendered. Simons Mortuary has been

entrusted with arrangements. Online condolences may be made at [simonsmortuary.com](http://simonsmortuary.com).

The service will be live streamed on Simons Mortuary's Website or Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/Simons-Mortuary-232095303487150> promptly AT THE TIME OF THE SERVICE.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, social distancing is encouraged. To be consistent with recommendations from the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), funeral home directors have been instructed and should follow CDC guidelines on gatherings, including those directly related to funerals, visitations, or graveside services.

\*In an effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, we ask that everyone in attendance: wear a face mask and refrain from hugging, kissing and shaking hands (as hard as it is to see someone you care about and not touch them).

\*It is our responsibility as a Funeral Directors, to do everything we can to advise families in order to honor our beloved Families and to keep everyone as safe as possible.

Thanks in advance for your cooperation!

# Cemetery Details

## Resurrection Mausoleum & Cemetery

7519 North Allen Road  
Peoria, IL 61615  
<http://www.ccapeo.org/index.cfm?load=page&page=156>

# Previous Events

## Visitation

SEP **29**. 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM (CT)

Simons Mortuary Chapel  
912 W. John H. Gwynn, Jr. Ave.  
Peoria, IL 61605  
(309) 674-2638  
[info@simonsmortuary.com](mailto:info@simonsmortuary.com)  
<https://simonsmortuary.com>

## Visitation

SEP **30**. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

Prince of Peace Missionary Baptist Church  
711 East Arcadia Avenue  
Peoria, IL 61603

## Celebration of Life

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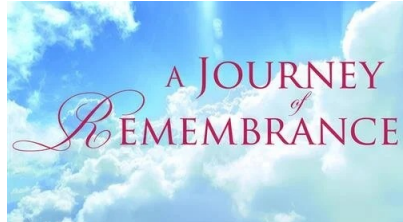
SEP **30**. 11:00 AM - 12:45 PM (CT)

Prince of Peace Missionary Baptist Church  
711 East Arcadia Avenue  
Peoria, IL 61603

# Tribute Wall



“ *Simons Mortuary created a Tribute Video in memory of Mr. Sam Polk*



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**Simons Mortuary** - September 29, 2021 at 03:15 PM

LS

*Sam was a wonderful spirit and committed leader for folk of color in Peoria. I remember once Sam invited me to listen to some Miles Davis and other great jazz artist. Sam knew I loved jazz and he had an outstanding collection. Sam will be truly missed but his legacy and commitment to diversity issues will always stand out. Peace and blessings to his family.*

*Lyle & La Smith  
Las Vegas, NV*

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**lyle smith** - September 29, 2021 at 03:44 PM



“ *Mr. Sam Polk*

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January 29, 2023 at 06:10 AM



“ *Mr. Sam Polk*

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January 29, 2023 at 03:12 AM

BB

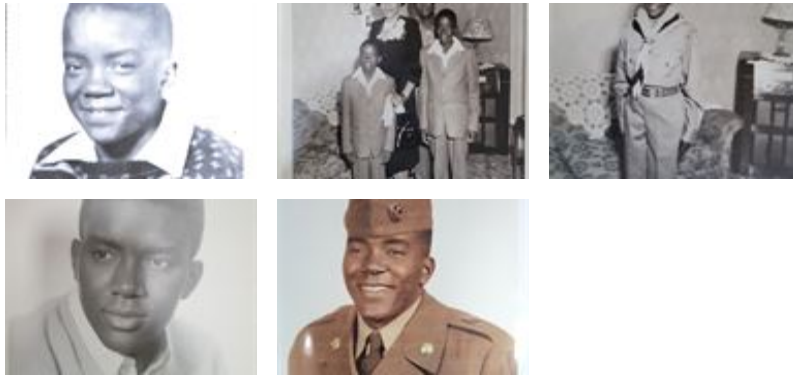
“ *Barbara Brown lit a candle in memory of Mr. Sam Polk*



Barbara Brown - September 29, 2021 at 06:30 PM



“ *14 files added to the album Life Tributes*



Simons Mortuary - September 29, 2021 at 03:15 PM

NW

*What a legacy of service! Mr. Polk was truly a kind and engaging man. I greatly enjoyed time spent with him and Mrs. Polk at reunions and other family events. I will never forget the warmth with which we were received in Peoria for the wedding by the entire family. I pray that God's peace be with you always, but especially today. May these beautiful memories sustain you and provide inspiration for the next generation.*

*With love,*

*Jeff, Nikki and Nigel*

Nichelle Wilson - September 30, 2021 at 09:58 AM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum* was purchased for the family of Mr. Sam Polk.



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September 29, 2021 at 02:18 PM



“ *The School Within a School Community* purchased the *Sentiments of Serenity Spray* for the family of Mr. Sam Polk.



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**The School Within a School Community** - September 29, 2021 at 12:04 PM



“ *Rena Webster-Horton* lit a candle in memory of Mr. Sam Polk



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**Rena Webster-Horton** - September 29, 2021 at 12:51 AM

MR

“ Dear Jean & Celeste,

*I am so sorry to hear of your loss. Sam was really a genuinely good person and he will be missed by many. Phil and I always enjoyed spending time with you both over a glass of wine and dinner. We learned a lot from you about the early days of struggles in Peoria. Thank you for being our friends.*

*Love and Prayers to you and your family.*

*Margene Reif*

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**Margene A. Reif** - September 28, 2021 at 06:31 PM

GL

“ Gower Family. One Love purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Mr. Sam Polk.



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**Gower Family. One Love** - September 28, 2021 at 10:21 AM



“ Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mr. Sam Polk.

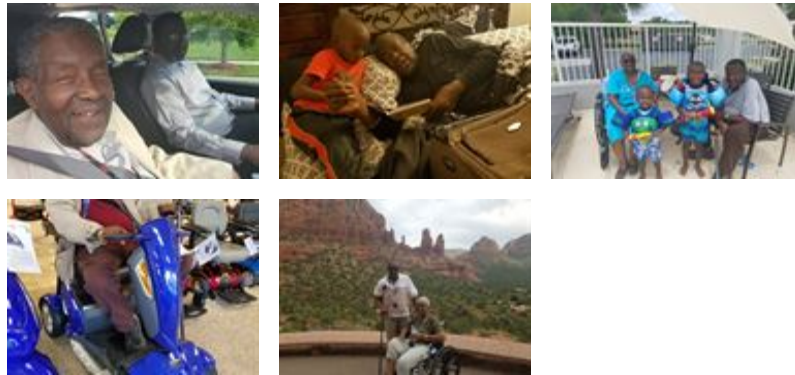


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September 27, 2021 at 09:56 PM



“ 18 files added to the album Life Tributes



Simons Mortuary - September 27, 2021 at 07:41 PM

VB

“ Mr. Sam Polk you were always at the front of the line when it came to EQUAL JUSTICE. You were there with MR. JOHN GYWNN in the 60s. We had a lot of pride in our city then one of your best friends MR.FRED MARBERRY will be greeting you in HEAVEN. We all had a BEAUTIFUL FRIEND SHIP BACK IN THOSE DAYS. JEAN was always so BEAUTIFUL AND KIND and we had so many GOOD MEMORIES. R.I.H my friend say hello to FRED, BOBBY JOE MASON and many many more of our friends. Jean there are better days ahead for you. May GOD continue to BLESS YOU. VERNELL RICHMOND-BRADSHAW.

Vernll Bradshaw - September 26, 2021 at 01:39 PM

LK

Sam was my surrogate dad when I was a teenager fresh out of high school and naive about boys. He introduced me to jumbo white shrimp and skyscraper buildings in Chicago; jazz music, life lessons on Saturday nights as he dressed for dates; and the civil rights movement in Peoria! He had a huge role in my village. : 1: ■

Lorene King - September 27, 2021 at 05:40 PM

PH

“ To The Family of Mr.Sam Polk ...my sincere condolences...I worked for Mr.Polk decade's ago... COP...he taught me a lot, one was how to stand up for myself with dignità & still keep a job....My prayers go up for the family & friends alike.... God makes no mistakes.... Love & Peace to you all.... Phil Hickman



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Phillip Hickman - September 25, 2021 at 11:05 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Mr. Sam Polk.



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September 24, 2021 at 08:33 PM

EB

“ Dear Family,  
Our thoughts and prayers are with you during this very difficult time.  
May God's blessing sustain you and give you peace 🙏

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Elwood and Logean Billups - September 23, 2021 at 09:38 AM

LW

“ Mr. Polk was a very kind and generous man. He was also one who like to discuss issues. I remember he and I discussing just about everything: politics, religion, family, giving back to your community, self-esteem, etc. We had some heated discussions at times; however, that didn't stop him. He kept coming back. I believe he enjoyed my feisty personality and I enjoy talking/sharing ideas with him. He treated me and my family with kindness and affection. He and Jean attended my Graduation from Luther Rice University/Seminary. I have that picture on my desktop computer. And yes, Rhonda He will be missed at the Jones/Williams Family Reunions. He will be truly missed. And I will see him again one day.

Celeste, Jean, Kenny and the entire family you have my deepest sympathy. Mr. Polk's work/service speaks for him. Family may your memories comfort you in the days ahead.

Ms. Lavinia E. Williams (Donald's mother).

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Lavinia E. Williams - September 23, 2021 at 12:08 AM

SS

“ Celeste,  
I am so grateful and blessed to have met your dad! He gave so much and such an amazing husband and father. I remember one cold night when your dad went outside to do something and it was soooo cold it took his breath. We were all concerned and thought it was a heart problem but the cold air had simply gone into his chest. It turned out that he was perfectly fine the next day 🙌🙌🙌❤️ Was he visiting you at that time or was he in Peoria? That was around 2003 I think! Wow! I know you have so many great memories to cherish!!! I love you and praying for you and Mom ❤️❤️❤️🙏🙏🙏



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Sheron White Simpson - September 22, 2021 at 09:08 PM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Mr. Sam Polk.*



September 22, 2021 at 09:00 PM



“ *Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mr. Sam Polk.*



September 21, 2021 at 07:46 AM



“ *Mr. Sam,  
I will surely miss you coming by the office and the meaningful chats we had. You were always there with a listening ear and sound advise, but only when I asked for it. You and Mama Jean mean the world to me. I will keep a ginger ale on ice for you. See you when I see you! Love always... cami*

**Cami Kellerstrass** - September 20, 2021 at 05:04 PM



*My first cousin, who was also a Father figure who introduced me to skyscraper buildings of Chicago, giant late night fried shrimp, jazz music, and Peoria's civil rights movement with Mr. John Gywnn. Lifelong memories that keep hope alive for a better tomorrow. 🙏🙏*

**Lorene King** - September 21, 2021 at 06:01 AM

CJ

*I always thought Sam and Jean were such a lovely couple. Sam was like a gentle giant. I have memories of the Polk family from my childhood. A great family! He will be remembered and missed. My prayers go out to his family. Cecilia Jordan*

**Cecilia Jordan** - September 22, 2021 at 01:05 PM

KJ

“*Mr. Polk was always a great friend to my parents, John and Cozetter Gwynn, and our entire family.*

*Through his tireless work with the NAACP, he was a committed champion for civil rights, justice, equity, and inclusion for all citizens of Peoria, and those across the country. His gentle, yet outspoken nature during the most turbulent times in the Movement, helped to create economic, educational, and job opportunities for people throughout Illinois.*

*Mr. Polk was a dedicated husband, father, and grandfather. Simply talking about his family put a gleam in his eyes.*

*We will miss his good humor, kindness, and loyalty to all he held dear.*

*The Gwynn Family honors the memories created, the battles won, and the legacy of dedication to equal justice.*

*Mr. Polk – we respect and love you!!*

*Peace and Blessings to Jean, Celeste, and family.*

*With honor,  
Kathy Gwynn Jones  
On behalf of the Gwynn Family*

**Kathy Gwynn Jones** - September 20, 2021 at 04:52 PM



CA

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



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**Cami** - September 19, 2021 at 10:36 PM

CA

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



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**Cami** - September 19, 2021 at 10:31 PM

RW

“ *Mr. Polk you will be truly miss especially at the Jones and William family reunion. You are home now. Sleep in peace.*

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**rhonda walton** - September 19, 2021 at 09:10 PM

&H

*A Gentle Giant with a heart made of gold. A provider, leader, giver, one who serves other and fights for what is right. I met Mr. & Mrs. Polk through their Baby Girl Celeste. Mr. Polk once told me, thanks for being his daughter's father away from home. It was an honor being blessed by a wonderful and wise man. Be blessed and rest. Your Baby Girl is in good hands with à wonderful man who mirrors your qualities. Love.  
Hawk*

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**Ronald Hawkins** - September 22, 2021 at 09:07 PM

MC

“ When he joined our family I remember thinking " Now I have A REAL Uncle Sam"lol. Rest in Heavenly Peace Uncle Sam.

Mitchell Chappelle - September 19, 2021 at 01:56 PM

MW

“ Uncle Sam you and Aunt Jean were always there to guide and to enrich my son's life. Thank you for the love you showed to him and our family. Much love and Gratefulness.



Mary Ward - September 19, 2021 at 01:16 PM

DW

“ Sorry for your lost prayers for family and friends in Jesus name rip in Jesus name amen



Dorotha Williams - September 18, 2021 at 09:04 PM