



## Joe Louis Clark

May 8, 1937 - December 29, 2020

Joe Clark, Paterson, New Jersey's "Principled Principal," Has Passed Away  
The No-Nonsense Educator was a Mentor for Students to Lean On

Dr. Joe Louis Clark, the baseball bat and bullhorn-wielding Principal whose unwavering commitment to his students and uncompromising disciplinary methods at Paterson, New Jersey's Eastside High School inspired the 1989 film "Lean on Me," has passed away. A longtime resident of South Orange, NJ, Clark (83) retired to Gainesville, Florida. He was at home and surrounded by his family when he succumbed to his long battle with illness of December 29, 2020.

Born in Rochelle, Georgia, on May 8, 1937, Clark's family moved north Newark, New Jersey, when he was six years old. It was in the Garden State that Clark built his legacy through both his accomplished career in education and his children: Olympian and businesswoman Joetta Clark Diggs, Olympic Athlete and Director of Bermuda Sports Tourism Business Development Hazel Clark, and accomplished athlete and Director of Track and Field and Cross Country at Stanford University Dr. Joe Clark, Jr.

### A Legacy of Laying Down the Law

After graduating from Newark Central High School, Clark continued on to achieve his bachelor's degree from William Paterson College (now William Paterson University) a master's degree from Seton Hall University, and an honorary doctorate from the U.S. Sports Academy.

Dr. Clark's post-collegiate career as a U.S. Army Reserve Sergeant and Drill Instructor engrained in him the respect for order and achievement, which came to define his more than three-decade career in education.

First serving as Paterson grade schoolteacher and the Director of Camps and Playgrounds in Essex County, NJ, Clark soon found his calling in administration as

Principal of PS 6 Grammar School. Under Clark's command, the once failing school was transformed into the "Miracle of Carroll Street."

Committed to the pursuit of excellence, Dr. Clark greeted the challenges presented to him following his appointment as the Principal of crime and drug-ridden Eastside High School with eager optimism. In one day, he expelled 300 students for fighting, vandalism, abusing teachers, and drug possession and lifted the expectations of those that remained, continually challenging them to perform better. Roaming the hallways with a bullhorn and a baseball bat, Dr. Clark's unorthodox methods won him both admirers and critics nationwide. Steadfast in his approach, Dr. Clark explained that the bat was not a weapon but a symbol of choice: a student could either strike out or hit a home run.

Impressed by the expeditious changes imparted on the troubled school, President Reagan offered Dr. Clark a White House policy advisor position. Dr. Clark's dedication to his students and community-led him to decline the prestigious honor, and his larger-than-life career continued to spark conversations across the country. Dr. Clark appeared on programs including 60 Minutes and The Arsenio Hall Show and was featured on Time Magazine's cover before the motion picture "Lean On Me," starring Morgan Freeman memorialized his work.

After he retired from Eastside in 1989, Dr. Clark worked for six years as the Director of Essex County Detention House, a juvenile detention center in Newark. He also wrote Laying Down the Law: Joe Clark's Strategy for Saving Our Schools, detailing his methods for turning around Eastside High School and how they can be applied to combat crime, permissiveness, and academic decline in schools nationwide. Nearly thirty years after his retirement, Dr. Clark's captivating career offered inspiration to executive directors John Legend and LeBron James for a television series, reflecting his philosophies' generational transcendence.

Predeceased by his wife, Gloria, Dr. Clark's legacy as an influential educator and father of New Jersey's most storied track and field family lives on through his children, Joetta, Hazel, and JJ, and grandchildren, Talitha, Jorell, and Hazel.

Special thanks to his Stepchildren; Cheryl E Norman, Victoria D Norman Brown, Judith I. Norman, and their children; Uma Ali, Carla Jasmine, Jason Lee, Satchel, and Cole Brown for the meaningful role they played in Dr. Clark's life.

A celebration of Joe's Life and Legacy will be held Monday, January 4, 2021, at 12:00 Noon at Jonesville Baptist Church 17722 S.W. 15th Ave Newberry FL. 32669, with Pastor

Corey Cheramie officiating. Burial to follow at Forest Meadows West. A viewing will be from 11:00 a.m. until the hour of service. Mask's are required.

# Events

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**JAN** **Viewing** 11:00AM - 12:00PM

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Jonesville Baptist Church

17722 SW 15th Avenue, Newberry, FL, US, 32669

**JAN** **Celebration of Life** 12:00PM

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Jonesville Baptist Church

17722 SW 15th Avenue, Newberry, FL, US, 32669

# Comments

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“ Dr. Clark thank you very much for your outstanding leadership and dedication to this wonderful field called education. You have definitely been an inspiration to me as an educator. Also, I want to extend my condolences and sympathy to the family and friends of Dr. Joe Louis Clark. May you all find peace and blessings in your many days to come.

**Bhoke Lumumba** - March 05 at 10:58 AM

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“ I am a retired teacher who prepared myself for each new school year by watching this beloved movie, "Lean On Me"! It is a remarkable demonstration of how Teacher Training should be and the unlimited potential of each student when they know you care about them.  
Thank you Mr. Clark. I will continue to watch the movie in honor of your legacy.

Marilyn Bell-Hawley MEd  
National Board Certified Teacher  
Durham, NC

**marilyn bell-hawley** - January 08 at 05:38 PM

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“ Thank you Mr. Clark for taking time out to listen! Those weekly chats in your office inspired me. You were always teaching us about impacting the world and make a difference. You were the best Principal ever... your legacy live on inside each and every one of us.

**A DePassThomas** - January 05 at 09:34 PM

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“ Reflecting our conversation on Black Opera Singers, Bumbry, Warfield, Verret, Price, Norman (the FISK Experience)... and the importance of students attending the New Jersey Opera Festival; when relating the art of singing to sports he purchased the bus and planned collaboratively for our EHS Choral Students to participate as soloists and choristers. Thanks Mr. Clark

Cora Quince, EHS Choral Director 1985-1995 forever in our hearts!

**Cora L Quince** - January 05 at 12:52 PM



“ Sweetest Sunrise Bouquet was purchased for the family of Joe Louis Clark.



January 04 at 07:33 PM

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“ I first met Mr. Clark in my late twenties at a BBQ Joetta had at her townhouse in Jersey. He was stern, but I could tell he had a sense of humor. While we were waiting outside for some food to be ready, he asked me something using words I am sure he knew I did not know. Instead of answering him as if I knew what he was talking about, I said to him "I would answer you but I need to get the definition of the word you just used". I think that impressed him more than me trying to come up with an intelligent answer. I did get a dictionary to look up the word, I think he told me to get it :). The rest of the conversation was filled with ease and laughs. Moral of the story, be yourself, smart people respect that.

My prayers and condolences to the Clark family.

Lisa Midgette

Lisa Midgette - January 04 at 02:59 PM



“ You will never be forgotten.

Janet Pennanen - January 27 at 12:34 AM

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“ A sympathy card was purchased for the family of Joe Louis Clark.



January 04 at 02:38 PM

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“ As a coach and educator at Columbia High in Maplewood, NJ, I had the privilege of watching Joetta, JJ, and Hazel excel in the classroom and on the track. My added bonus was to be in the presence of their father, a man of many talents and wisdom. Joe Clark influenced so many so well. He will be missed. But his legacy will endure. Heaven now has more discipline. God bless the Clark family.  
Rich Moss and Kathleen Higgins Moss

**RICH MOSS** - January 04 at 02:04 PM

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“ Thank you Mr. Clark for all that you gave to "us" the Mighty Ghost! Your Legacy will always be cherished.

**Cheryl Coy** - January 04 at 01:10 PM

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“ Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Joe Louis Clark.



January 04 at 10:45 AM

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“ Condolences to the family of Joe Clark. Thank you Mr. Clark for lighting a fire in so many educators and administrators across the nation to instill in so many students the power of education and how it changes a person's life no matter where they start. You are missed.

**Lequvia Ousley** - January 03 at 04:29 PM

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“ My name is Guy Lightsey. Mr. Clark hired me as a paperboy in Newark,, NJ when I was 11 years old. He helped develop my work ethic by showing me how to expand my route, thus earn more. He exposed us paperboys to new experiences outside our neighborhood, such as trips to the Statue of Liberty and hockey games. He helped develop our characters without us realizing the importance of his influence at the time. I have always attributed his leadership and caring to whatever success I've achieved in life. My sincere condolences to the family, as one of his paperboy kids, I consider myself an honorary member.

Guy Lightsey - January 03 at 11:49 AM

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“ Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Joe Louis Clark.



January 03 at 11:13 AM

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“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Joe Louis Clark.



January 03 at 10:46 AM

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“ Thank you Dr. Clark for transforming EHS into an "educational mecca" and assisting its students in far too many ways to list here. You cared for the whole child, not just the educational child. So many students became leaders in education, science and other fields because you encouraged them. You also encouraged me to follow a path in educational leadership, one I never regretted. Thank you for so many, many memories and for my "expanded vocabulary"! Rest in peace.

Marilyn Di Martino - January 02 at 04:48 PM

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“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Joe Louis Clark.



January 02 at 04:41 PM

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“ Guiding Light Bouquet was purchased for the family of Joe Louis Clark.



January 02 at 02:45 PM

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“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Joe Louis Clark.



January 02 at 02:14 PM

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“ We have lost an Amazing great man but Heaven has gained an Angel Rest well my Principal Mr Joe Clark

**Vernell Williams** - January 02 at 02:08 PM

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“McEntyre”!!!! To my office move expeditiously. You want to be a rapper but you cut your English class this many times. I am sad to tell you your time here is done” His tough love changed my life RIP Mr JC we will meet again!

Thomas Prince Cree McEntyre - January 02 at 02:08 PM

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“ It was awesome to have a principal that was all about his students receiving the best education regardless to their financial situations at home. What I loved the most about Mr. Clark is how he knew each one of his students by name!! I can remember one time while I was at my locker getting books for my later class (and I was eating a bag of chips) because I was on my way to lunch. I saw Mr. Clark in the hallway and he called out to me. As I approached him he said “Ingram why aren’t you in class and why are you eating chips so early (while he’s placing his hand in my chip bag) didn’t you eat breakfast at home”! I said Mr. Clark I’m on my way to lunch and no I didn’t eat breakfast because I had band practice this morning. Mr. Clark looked at me and said “very good, very good” then he walked off with my bag of chips! I’m definitely going to miss you Mr. Clark (my other dad)

Ms. Ingram - January 02 at 12:20 PM

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“ My heart hurts because Dr. Clark was my father figure! He is one of the major reason why I have my PhD today, He will always have a special place in my heart



Dr. Pinky Miller - January 02 at 12:20 PM

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“ Strength & Solace Spray was purchased for the family of Joe Louis Clark.



January 01 at 06:51 PM

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“Never give up.”

That wasn't just another feel good quote. It was a mandate by which you - Dr. Clark - lived.

Your work here may be done but your legacy of self-reliance, integrity, and dedication to excellence lives on through all of the people whose lives you touched.

It was an honor to know you.

Rest easy now with your beloved Gloria.

Salute.

Love,

Judy Norman

**Judith Norman** - January 01 at 06:47 PM

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“Paterson Superintendent of School Eileen Shafer said in a statement that Joe Clark “left his indelible mark on public education by being fiercely devoted to the students in his care” and “demanded more from his students because he believed they could achieve more than what was expected of them. “But in the end, it is the many lives Joe Clark influenced for the better that have become his greatest legacy,” Shafer said.

As an educator and family member for more than 30 years, I couldn't agree more.

Victoria Brown, daughter of Gloria Irene Clark

**Victoria Brown** - January 01 at 08:27 AM

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“My heart goes out to the Clark family for their loss. I grew up in Paterson and attended Eastside High, but left long before Mr. Clark was there. I was privileged to meet him when he came to San Angelo, Texas, on a speaking tour in the early 90s. He was dedicated to his students and his methodologies. Mr. Clark leaves behind a sound legacy of compassion and empathy for others. He will be sorely missed. I'll keep Mr. Clark and his family in my thoughts and prayers.

**Ron Graham** - December 31, 2020 at 11:46 PM



“ My sincere condolences to the Clark family. May your loving memories of Dr. Clark bring you peace, comfort and strength during these difficult times. As his neighbor Joe shared many quotes. This one was one of my favorites.”Live simply, love generously, care deeply, speak kindly, and leave the rest to God”. I’m truly going to miss him. May he Rest In Peace. Reba Williams



**Reba Williams** - December 31, 2020 at 10:23 PM

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“ The Campbells will truly miss Joe our other brother from another mother Our mother took Joe as a son we took him as a brother  
Heart are heavy but from God we come to him we will return praying that God forgive him (Joe) his sins and grant him paradise  
To God be the Glory  
Clark family you are in our prayers Peace and Love

**Melvina Campbell Odom** - December 31, 2020 at 11:36 AM

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“ Brenda Huntley lit a candle in memory of Joe Louis Clark



**Brenda Huntley** - December 31, 2020 at 11:19 AM

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“ Joe Clark is a man I admired very much after seeing the movie "lean on Me": This country needs more Joe Clark's. RIP Joe. Peg & John Pedersen

Peg Pedersen - December 31, 2020 at 08:48 AM

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“ To the Clark Family;  
Dr Joe Clark sent a message to his students that it was not okay to behave in a negative way.  
He became a role model for many parents and teachers. I always express "being accountable," to my students and children. Thank you for sharing him with us. May God continue to bless you.

Ron Johnson  
Educator

Ron Johnson - December 31, 2020 at 07:07 AM

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“ My kids and I loved "Lean on Me," and as Postmaster of Newberry, FL Post Office, I met him as one of my customers. I saw him frequently and he was larger than life. Of course, his cowboy hat helped with that image, but he was really a special person. I'm no longer in Newberry and haven't seen him in years, but I was sorry to hear of his passing. God Bless his children and grandchildren and those who loved him.

Celeste Barrett Rubanick - December 30, 2020 at 10:58 PM

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“ There are no mere words I can offer to assuage the grief felt by so many at the news of Mr. Clark's passing. I can only offer my deepest sympathies to his family, friends, and many others who loved him. I had the opportunity to conduct a telephone interview of Mr. Clark back in the 80's for a sociology paper I was presenting. I had no idea of what to expect or how my request for an interview would be met, but I found him to be impressive, unabashedly honest, and a most genteel man of substantial integrity and learning. He was then, and I will always remember him as, an incredibly well-spoken man of conviction. I am saddened to hear of his passing and find this world a bit less bright without him in it. May he rest in well-deserved Peace.

Scott Frederick - December 30, 2020 at 08:18 PM

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“ Dr. Joe L Clark made his mark in the world as well as with family and friends. I and my family were one of the lucky ones to have him in our corner as a stepdad, pop pa, and friend who gave us the drive and motivation to be the best that we can be. He would continuously say to me and my children - 'I want you to strive for the top, the bottom is too crowded' (SMILE).

Words cannot truly express my feelings at this time but I know that God had a better plan for him. Passing along prayers and support to the Clark Family-he will be truly missed.

Cheryl E. Norman & Family



**Cheryl Norman** - December 30, 2020 at 06:17 PM



“ I worked for Mr.Clark at Eastside High School. Great person and a gentle man. RIP.

**Louise** - December 31, 2020 at 10:48 PM



“ Best principal ever had the privilege to have him as my principal may he rest in paradise also knew him from PS 6,my condolences to the family

**Maribel** - January 02 at 04:17 PM



“ "Mr. Clark don't play!"

May he rest well until the master's return.

**Carolyn F Jennings-Wright** - January 08 at 07:09 PM