

## *Synopsis of A Legacy's Life*

*In the words of Maya Angelou, **All God's Children Need traveling Shoes**, Mr. John Alliston White, Sr. parents put on his traveling shoes on October 27, 1924. He is the son of the late Mr. Bonaparte "BP" and Mrs. Gussie Wright White, and the brother of the late Mr. Benjamin Bonaparte "BB" White and the late Mrs. Mamie L. Miller Wilson.*

*John is an 87 year member of the Greater St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church where he attended Sunday School and was a member of the A.C. E. League(youth group) as a child and young adult. He was a League He was elected as a Trustee more than sixty years ago. In 1995, he was appointed as Trustee Emeritus and was re-elected in 1998 and was reappointed as Trustee Emeritus in 2001. He continued his spiritual journey by working with the with the Children's Church, until infirmities of the aged said: I am in your life now. He acts as grandfather to all the young children in the children. He is affectionately called, Grandpa White or Granddaddy.*

*John attended the Savannah Chatham County Public Schools, Paulsen Street School and graduated in 1943 from the Alfred Ely beach Culyer High School. John is an active participant with his graduating class and serves as treasurer.*

*His cousin, Ruth Howard Standback (Tuskegee, AL), recalled her fondest memory of living in Savannah when she and John attended Beach-Culyer. She adored John as her "big brother." She said he drove her and her friends to school in his car. He was very proud to have owned "Tin Lizzy." Her saddest memory is when he graduated and enlisted in the military leaving her behind in Savannah..*

*Upon enlisting in the United States Marine Corps in 1943, John served 22 months in the South Pacific as a member of the 51st Defense Battalion – the first African American combat outfit. He served three years in the Corps and was honorably discharged in 1946 as Corporal. John frequently comment that when he enlisted in the marines, the commanding general remarked that "when I see you people wearing our globe and anchor there must be a war going on." Because of that comment John decided that he and the other Savannah men who enlisted will withstand the prejudices and bigotry bestowed upon them. Recognizing the valor and bravery of the first African Americans to serve as a marine, John and over 400 surviving veterans were bestowed the congressional gold medal of honor for their service to the United States of America.*

*In 1946, after John enrolled at Georgia State College (Savannah State University), he and other outstanding respectable African American men were presented with the offer to become police officers. The men, not knowing what to expect, were secretly trained as police officers. Because of their faith and trust in God and the fortitude to create an environment that would be safe, and to increase the trustworthiness of the Savannah Police Department, they endured the rigorous training. As a result, the distinction as the "Original Nine" came into existence. Continuing his career as a police officer, he was promoted to Corporal in 1956. In 1963, he was promoted to Sergeant and served as shift Commander for 33 months without the rank and monetary compensation.*

*In the 1950's and 1960's, when the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King came to Savannah, Georgia, John served as his personal body guard. In his job performance, he was appointed as the primary arresting officer of the demonstrators during the Civil Rights Movement.*

*John's exceptional job and duty performances enabled him to receive numerous awards, citations and commendations throughout his career as a police officer, notably from J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigations, for arresting one of the most wanted person of that era. The late United States President Ronald Reagan, the late United States Senator Matt Mattingly, Georgia former Governor Zell Miller, and many other honored him for serving as the first sworn African American police in the state of Georgia and the south. With their dedication and perseverance, "The Original Nine" cleared the path for other persons of color and other minorities to become a person in blue serving with honor and distinction as a Savannah Police Officer. Sergeant White served from May 2, 1947 until his retirement as*

*Lieutenant on October 27, 1984 with 37 ½ years of public service.*

*John and Sallie C. Williams White were united in Holy Matrimony for nearly 45 years until her death, July 16, 1995. As a husband and father, John provided all the comforts of life. There was not a time when his family was neglected socially, economically, emotionally, financially and spiritually. As a result of their love, five children were born: John, Jr. (Connie), Jonathan, Cheryl (late husband Willie James Coakley), Salathia and Tyrone. His grandchildren are Giovanni White, Nyre Coakley, Jonathan Weaver, Thomas Coakley, Shannon Coakley and Covena and Cierra White. John's great-grandchildren are Nykria Davis, Brandon Jones, Arielle Camil "Miss Camil" Coakley and Kendall Coakley.*

*Often times his family was faced with the harsh reality of him being an African American police officer in the South. His family remained united and supportive of his endeavors. His wife, Miz Sallie often commented that it is hard for him to leave home as a man and go to work as a "boy." John faced many adversities during his life as a marine and as a police officer. Nevertheless, he persevered and continued his journey, paving the way for other persons of color to be able to join the ranks of the men in blue.*

*Throughout John's career as a police officer, many people, especially grown men, thanked him teased him about the discipline that he had given them, saving them from a life as a career criminal. Miz Sallie often talked about the young men who stopped by the house as they picked up their children from Frank W. Spencer School. They related to her how Officer White influenced their life. They said they would not have become the men they are today if he had not intervened when they were on the road to committing criminal activities.*

*As a father, John would play baseball and half rubber with his children and the neighborhood youth. On weekend outings, he would take the family to the "Negro" beaches in South Carolina – Hilton Head, Singleton and Burke, because African Americans were not allowed to enjoy the segregated white beaches. Other family outings included Sol's Place (Wilmington Island, GA), Derrick's Inn and to Aunt Elizabeth house in Sylvania Georgia. During the summers, he traveled with his family to Tuskegee to visit his cousins. There were many occasions that John and his family would visit with his cousin, Philip, in Ridgeland, SC.*

*Throughout his sons teen years, John would take them fishing and hunting and demonstrated the art of cleaning and preparing the "catch of the day." During his children's youth, Big John and Miz Sallie home was the neighborhood hangout. Young people from all walks of life enjoyed being at "Sergeant White's" house, playing cards, eating and watching television. The neighborhood kids were so comfortable being there and would come just to sit on the front porch and hang out with Miz Sallie.*

*Even today, many youngsters go to this house talk with him about his life as police officer. Not only did he explain the do's and don'ts of life, he filled their stomach with treats, seafood and sweets, especially peppermints.*

*Many times, he and Miz Sallie had gone to the slaughter house to have beef and pork cured and purchase chickens for their children participate with the plucking of feather and the wringing of the neck. Seafood was always abundant. The deep freezer was full, as it is today. He spared no expense in feeding his family and shared food and finances with others who were in need.*

*Being a former "Jawhead" and serving as a police officer, he was the protector of the neighborhood to the widowed neighbors. He was called upon to day and night from community people who sought legal advice and information. Many times he would leave home at night to counsel those in distress. As he explained to Miz Sallie the events that had unfolded, she would say a silent prayer for his safe return home.*

*Through his journey and with the many accolades and thank-yous from family and community, he was blessed to have lived to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor on June 27, 2012 for valor and service to his country, the United States of America. He said when Lt. General Walter Gaskins presented him with the NATO medallion, he thought he would never*