



Joyce Pierce Smith

December 13, 2025

Joyce Pierce Smith transitioned on Saturday, December 13, 2025, in Oakland, California after a brief illness. During that entire time she was surrounded by her loving family and friends. Joyce Pierce Smith was born on Christmas Eve in New Orleans, Louisiana, to the delight of her parents, Frank and Victoria Pierce. However, this bundle of joy did not enter the world alone, for she was accompanied by her twin sister, Loyce, with whom she shared an unbreakable bond. Their brother, Leonard, embraced his role as “big brother” with joy and honor, a role he continues to embody today. Joyce often referred to him as her hero and protector. They grew up in a home filled with love and a deep faith nurtured by their mother, a devout Catholic. They received their sacraments at St. Peter Claver Catholic Church in the historic Treme Neighborhood. After moving into their dream home, built by their father, a foreman with a major construction company, the family joined St. Raymond Catholic Church. Joyce's academic preparation began in the New Orleans public school system. After graduating from Joseph S. Clark High School, she married and to this union a darling daughter, Yolonda, was born.

Growing up in the segregated South, Joyce fought against racial injustices by participating in marches and protests, including the historic march in New Orleans led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. With deep conviction, she made the difficult decision to leave her beloved family and moved to New York, along with her childhood friend Sharon Blache. Subsequently, she returned to New Orleans and through a mutual friend met the love of her life, Melvin D. Smith.

Following their marriage, they moved to San Francisco, CA. Their family expanded with the birth of their beloved baby boy, Melvin D., Jr. The family bond they shared was unbreakable. Joyce loved California and immersed herself in the lifestyle. She continued her fight for equality, joining in demonstrations organized by the Black Panther Party in Oakland, CA. Driven by a lifelong thirst for knowledge, Joyce pursued higher education and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from California State University. Her professional career began as a long-distance telephone operator at Pacific Bell, where she was elected to represent employees on the Communications Workers of America Executive Board. She later entered the financial industry, becoming the first African American hired as a branch manager at Security Pacific Bank. Joyce eventually transitioned into public service as a Human Resources professional for the City of Richmond, CA, where she spent many years before retiring.

Joyce had a keen interest in business development, as well as an entrepreneurial spirit. Following her retirement, she embarked upon several business ventures including establishing Communication Network, Inc., TransportSafe Training Truck Driving Center, Neighborhood Entrepreneur Development, and a computer training program in New Orleans. Joyce eventually fulfilled a dream of opening an aromatherapy store with her daughter, Yolonda, naming it CandleJoy, which incorporated part of her name. The opportunity to consult and establish a business in New Orleans was of paramount importance because it allowed her to be present regularly with her beloved New Orleans family.

Joyce's home was filled with the flavors and sounds of New Orleans. There was often the aroma of Creole dishes she learned to prepare under her mother's guidance. She was an excellent cook, or as she would insist, a "chef." Alongside Yolonda, she recreated meals inspired by top chefs, adding her signature dash of Creole seasoning. Friends of Yolonda and Melvin eagerly visited, knowing they would always be served something delicious. The welcoming environment she created defined her spirit of generosity. The

sense of family, extending love by doing and caring for others, exemplified living out her faith.

One of her greatest joys was being “Mother” to Yolonda and Melvin. The deep love she showered on her son and daughter was returned to her immensely, especially following the loss of her loving husband. Yolonda and Melvin, supported by their life partners, Ricky and Shoola, devoted their lives to the care and wellbeing of their mother. No greater love was witnessed as their daily attentiveness was on full display as they showered her with their undying love. All was not serious with Joyce, for she had a playful spirit and was young at heart. She devised opportunities to share experiences that young family members enjoyed, which solidified their bond. The essence of Joyce's life is built upon three pillars – Faith, Family, and Love. Faith shaped her, family sustained her, and love lifted her in life and beyond.

Throughout her life's journey, in every situation her mantra was "Count It All Joy." Joyce leaves to continue her legacy her cherished daughter, Yolonda Thomas (Ricky) and her beloved son, Melvin D. Smith (Shoole) of Richmond, CA; her loving brother, Leonard R. Pierce, Sr., (Dorothy); inseparable, cherished twin sister, Loyce Pierce Wright; remarkable brother-in-law John Joseph; dedicated nieces, Monique Hamilton, MD (Neal), Kiana Wright, PsyD of Kennesaw, GA, and Arlinda Westbrook, Esq. (Toikus); adored nephews Reverend Leonard R. Pierce Jr. (Erika) of Austin, TX, Bishop Edward Pierce, III (Dionka), and Eric Pierce, PhD (Anitra) of Loudon, TN; embraced sisters Cheryl Wells of Vallejo, CA, Geraldine Pierce, Sayonara Williams (Willie) of Kennesaw, GA, and Charmaine Neville; committed godson Saltan Thomas of Oakland, CA, and a host of nieces, nephews, great nieces, great nephews, cousins, and other relatives and friends. She was preceded in death by her parents, Frank & Victoria Pierce, her husband Melvin D. Smith, her brother-in-law, Louis C. Wright, Jr.; her embraced brother Edward Pierce Jr., and her uncle Lawrence Martin.

Family and friends are invited to attend the Celebration of Life 10:00 am, and a Mass of Christian Burial at 11:00 am at St. Raymond & St. Leo the Great Catholic Church, 2916 Paris Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70122 on Saturday, December 27, 2025. Visitation at 9:00 am, Rosary at 9:45 am, Father Stanley K. Ihouma, SSJ, Pastor, Father Anthony M. Bozeman, SSJ, Celebrant. The service will be live streamed on St. Raymond & St. Leo the Great YouTube and Facebook pages. Interment at Lake Lawn Metairie Funeral Home and Cemetery. Arrangements by D.W. Rhodes Funeral Home, 3933 Washington Avenue. You may sign the guest book on www.rhodesfuneral.com In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the YWCA Greater New Orleans <https://www.mightycause.com/organization/Young-Womens-Christian-Association-Of-New-Orleans>. D.W. Rhodes Funeral Home in charge (504) 943-3422.

Previous Events

Visitation

DEC 27. 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

St. Leo/St. Raymond Catholic Church
2916 Paris Ave
New Orleans, LA

Recitation of the Rosary

DEC 27. 9:45 AM (CT)

St. Leo/St. Raymond Catholic Church
2916 Paris Ave
New Orleans, LA

Celebration of Life

DEC 27. 10:00 AM (CT)

St. Leo/St. Raymond Catholic Church
2916 Paris Ave
New Orleans, LA

Mass of Christian Burial

DEC 27. 11:00 AM (CT)

St. Leo/St. Raymond Catholic Church
2916 Paris Ave
New Orleans, LA

Tribute Wall



“ *"Sending You an Angel" Statue Candle Holder with LED Candle to Express Sympathy was purchased for the family of Joyce Pierce Smith.*



December 27, 2025 at 12:19 PM



“ *From Nony Mbaezue planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Joyce Pierce Smith.*

From Nony Mbaezue - December 27, 2025 at 12:19 PM



“ *With all our love, we are praying with you. May Aunt Joyce rest in peace. Condolences to Loyce & Kiana Wright & family.*

Les & Brittany Summersgill



brittany summersgill - December 27, 2025 at 01:02 AM



“ *She was a Dear Friend of my Sister Sandra who attended Joseph Clark together. Her Beloved Sister Dot and San were very closely knited women back then and I Adored their Friendship! My Condolences to the Pierce family along with other family members From the Green Family...RiP*

Ty Green 504 339 4008 - December 26, 2025 at 11:18 AM

MV

“ *Dear Loyce and Family,
I shall forever treasure Joyce with fond memories and much love.
Sometimes it hurts to give back to the Master, though we know He
is gentle and kind. May he personally soothe your breaking heart.
We love you friend,
Larry and Marilyn Vandergriff*

Marilyn Vandergriff - December 24, 2025 at 05:06 PM