



# The Clerk's Black History Series

## Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



### "Muhammad Ali Saves a Life"

(January 19, 1981)

#### "Muhammad Ali Stops a Man Threatening to Jump from a Window"

**Muhammad Ali** - Everyone knows he's "The Greatest" - "The Champ" - that he "Floats like a Butterfly and Stings like Bee," winning 56 fights and only losing 5 during his career, but did you know that Muhammed Ali once stopped a man that was threatening to jump to his death?

It was Monday, January 19, 1981 when a 21-year-old man from Michigan, the newspapers referred to as "Joe," slipped around on the narrow edge of a rail on the ninth floor of a high-rise office building on Wilshire Boulevard.

Police negotiators, a psychologist and a minister tried for three hours to persuade the man to come down from the edge, but to no avail. Muhammad Ali's fast thinking public relations manager was on the scene watching things unfold when he saw that negotiation efforts were failing. He asked the police if Ali could help, but they told him no. Knowing the power and influence Ali had on the nation, he called anyway and told the Champ what was happening just a mile away from his Los Angeles home.

Ali arrived about four minutes later, driving his Rolls-Royce on the wrong side of the street toward the chaotic scene. Seconds later, with that Ali persuasion, the police relented and allowed The Champ to enter the building. Soon he appeared at a window next to where "Joe" was positioned on a fire escape. He reportedly told him "You're my brother, I love you and I wouldn't lie to you. You got to listen. I want you to come home with me, meet some friends of mine." Ali then went into the vestibule area where Joe was sitting on the ledge and continued pleading. Twenty minutes later, with tears flowing from Ali's eyes as well as Joe's, Ali wrapped his arms around him as he relinquished his ledge and came down.

Muhammed Ali, dressed in a suit and tie, walked with Joe out of the building as news cameras and reporters surrounded the two men. Ali drove Joe to the police station in his Rolls-Royce and later went with him to a psychiatric hospital.

The crowd that gathered that day chanted "USA! Digs Ali, USA! Digs Ali," as he left the scene with the man he had saved.

Muhammad Ali was indeed, The Greatest of All Time.

