

## Obituary of Byron J. Johnson

Byron Jerald Johnson, son of Arlie and Bronell Johnson, a poet and retired Justice of the Idaho Supreme Court died on December 9, 2012 at his home in Boise, due to cancer of his lower jaw. Justice Johnson has lived in Boise all his life with the exception of seven years he spent in Cambridge, Massachusetts from 1955 to 1962, attending Harvard College and Harvard Law School and twenty years in Idaho City from 1986 to 2006 where he lived with his wife Patricia G. Young, who was Magistrate Judge of Boise County.

Byron attended the first, second, and third grades in Eagle, Idaho, where his mother taught at the old Eagle High School. Byron completed his elementary and secondary education in Boise, graduating from Boise High School in 1955 as salutatorian.

Byron attended Harvard College on an academic scholarship, graduating in 1959 with honors in history. He was a pitcher on the Harvard varsity baseball team in 1958 and 1959. In 1958, Harvard won the championship of the Eastern Intercollegiate colleges, plus Army and Navy. In 1959, he finished his collegiate baseball career by pitching Harvard to a 10 to 0 victory over Yale.

While attending Harvard Law School, Byron was vice-president of the Harvard Voluntary Defenders, the first law student defender program in the nation.

In 1960, Byron married Marie Elizabeth Rauseo of Everett, Massachusetts. They had four children, Matthew, Ethan, Elaine, and Laura. In 1962, they returned to Boise. In 1980, Byron and Marie were divorced.

In 1984, Byron and Patricia G. Young were married.

From 1962 to 1972, Byron practiced law with the firm that became Elam, Burke, Jeppesen, Evans, and Boyd. From 1972 to 1977, Byron practiced with the firm that became known as Webb, Johnson, Redford, and Greener. From 1977 to 1988, he practiced alone.

In December 1987, Governor Cecil Andrus appointed Byron to the Idaho Supreme Court, filling the vacancy created by the death of Charles R. Donaldson. In 1992, Byron was elected to a six-year term. From 1993 to 1997, he was Vice-Chief Justice of the Court. At the conclusion of his term in 1999, Byron retired from the Court and began writing poetry, which he had pursued as a sometime avocation before that.

Byron loved Idaho's mountains, particularly the Sawtooths, and all the activities they have to offer, including camping, fishing, hiking, climbing, backpacking, and especially cross-country skiing. From 1999 to 2006, he would ski into Grandjean, on the South Fork of the Payette River above Lowman, to stay for a month in a rustic, one room cabin without running water, and with just a wood cook stove for heat and cooking. Except for an occasional visit by his wife, Patricia, or his son, Ethan, he spent his time alone, writing, thinking, and looking for mountain goats while soaking in the hot springs nearby.

Byron was very active in community organizations and politics. Among his leadership positions were president of the Boise Art Association, campaign chair and president of the United Fund of Ada County, national president of the National Association For Estate Planning Councils, president of the Idaho City Historical Foundation, president of the Frank Church Institute, chair of the Community

Advisory Board to Boise State Radio, president of the Poachers Club, and president of the Cabin (Log Cabin Literary Center),

In 1968, Byron was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. In 1973 and 1974, he was a member of the National Democratic Party Charter Commission.

In 1969, he was honored by the Idaho Statesman as a “Distinguished Citizen.” That same year, the Boise Jaycees awarded him their distinguished service award. In 1970, he was listed in the annual volume “Outstanding Young Men in America.” In 1998, he was named a member of the Boise High School Hall of Fame. In 2012, he was presented the “Peacemaker of the Year” Award by the Idaho Mediation Association. Earlier this year, Limberlost Press published his memoir “Poetic Justice.”

Byron was loving and devoted to his family. He is survived by his wife Patricia, his sister Rosalie (Johnni) Whitby of Seattle, his son Matt of Seattle, his son Ethan (Gabrielle Jennings) and granddaughter Phoebe of Los Angeles, his daughter Elaine McArthur (Phillip) and four grandchildren (Brook, Ajri, Maia, and Elijah) of Laie , Hawaii, his daughter Laura and grandson Lavran of Seattle.

At Byron’s request his remains have been cremated, there will be no memorial service. A celebratory wake will be held on January 6, 2012, 2 to 5 pm at the Barber Park Events Center.

Those who wish to honor Byron may give a contribution to The Cabin, 801 S. Capitol Blvd, Boise, ID 83702, where Byron spent many hours creating and reading poetry with the “Live Poets” group.