



## Donald H. Johnson

November 21, 1926 - May 3, 2023

With hearts full of nostalgia and love, we celebrate the life and passing of our soldier, teacher, coach, hero, and father on May 3, 2023...an outstanding member and model of America's "Greatest Generation."

Donald H. Johnson was born November 21, 1926 to Henning and Ida Johnson in Greenville, MI. He attended schools in Muskegon and was an outstanding athlete at Muskegon Heights, where he was the last surviving member of the Class of 1944.

In life and at the table, Don always "cleaned his plate." As someone who survived the Great Depression and then military rations while serving in the Navy in World War II and in the Army during the Korean War, he never met a meal that he didn't like. As a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart recipient during his four tours in the 24th Army Infantry, he carried trauma from these experiences through his life but was stoic and revealed few lasting effects other than periodic dreams that placed him back in combat. Upon discharge Don attended Central Michigan University where he played basketball and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Education.

In 1948, on leave from the army, he was picked up while hitch-hiking by Barbara and Beverly Huffman. In 1951 the latter became his wife and remained his partner, co-pilot, navigator, and critic through 67 years of

marriage until her passing in 2018. Don and Bev laid down roots in Cadillac and were both educators at Cadillac High School. DJ endeared himself to colleagues and students, especially his basketball players, as a passionate teacher, coach, and Athletic Director. His Viking basketball teams packed the gymnasium with spectators that enjoyed the fast pace of play and the passion of the players mentored by an often too highly-spirited coach.

Don is survived by his daughter Karen, Japanese daughter Yuki, daughter-in-law Kelly, grandchildren: Brian, David, Nina and Greg, along with five great grandchildren and many nieces and nephews. He is pre-deceased by his wife Beverly, brother Duane, sister Florence, and sons Steven & Carl.

In his 96 years DJ survived two wars, the loss of his wife, siblings, friends, and both sons but maintained his good humor, hearty laugh and had the wisdom of someone who knew they were truly blessed simply to be alive. His exceptional life is now concluded; his legacy is one of joy and love that can be witnessed in countless people he impacted along his path. He laughed a lot, he loved many, and oh, how he lived!

The family would like to thank the staff at Green Acres of Cadillac, Hospice of Michigan, and Gunsmoke reruns for making Dad's final years happy ones! And a special "thank you" to Rex Smith for his weekly visits, and Pepa and Bob for taking DJ on weekly outings for memories, cookies, and ice cream!

Funeral services will be held 7:00 PM, Friday, May 12, 2023 at Peterson Funeral and Cremation Services in Cadillac with Pastor Brennan Woell officiating. Friends may meet the family from 5:00 to 7:00 PM at the funeral home prior to the service. Burial will take place 10:00 AM Saturday, May 13, 2023 at Burdell Township Cemetery in Osceola County with full military rites under the auspices of the Cadillac Area Honor Guard.

In lieu of flowers memorial contributions may be made to Cadillac Viking Boosters. An online guestbook is available at [www.petersonfh.com](http://www.petersonfh.com).

# Previous Events

## Visitation

MAY 12. 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

Peterson Funeral and Cremation Services  
205 East Cass Street  
Cadillac, MI 49601

## Funeral Service

MAY 12. 7:00 PM (ET)

Peterson Funeral and Cremation Services  
205 East Cass Street  
Cadillac, MI 49601

## Burial

MAY 13. 10:00 AM (ET)

Burdell Township Cemetery  
Tustin, MI 49688

# Tribute Wall



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Donald H. Johnson.*



May 11, 2023 at 04:31 PM



“ *I feel very blessed to be one of the countless people who was profoundly impacted by DJ. As my teacher for World History, JV football coach, and varsity basketball coach he imparted invaluable life lessons to us all. He was a man of strength and passion and had a great sense of humor. He endured hardship, pain, and misfortune with uncommon dignity and did, indeed, live each day as a blessing. My last visit with DJ was just before his son, Carl, passed away. Like DJ, Carl was a pillar of strength and optimism and, during our visit, both Carl and DJ relished in reminiscing wonderfully funny episodes in their lives, fully embracing the day with smiles and laughter. What a wonderful memory—and lesson—of a life well lived. My deepest condolences to KJ and family.*

**Gary Dunbar** - May 09, 2023 at 02:55 PM



*Thanks Gary! What a nice day we had.....and glad to see you can still shoot hoops! KJ*

**Karen Holstrom** - May 09, 2023 at 05:21 PM

DN

“ When I started teaching and coaching at CHS, DJ became my mentor and friend. He gave me the opportunity to coach his jr teams in the 60s. I loved fast break basketball, and I came to the right place! It was enormous fun, coaching up and coming talent and being in the company of a coaching legen.I am so sorry I will not be there to honor and celebrate his life. I will be in England. My sympathies to KJ and Don’s extended family. RIP, DJ.

Doug Nelson - May 09, 2023 at 09:22 AM



Thanks Mr. Nelson 😊! We just went through Dad’s basketball scrapbook...and he’s saved several letters that you wrote for the paper, or to him personally. He was always grateful for his depth of coaching talent at all levels! KJ

Karen Holstrom - May 09, 2023 at 05:26 PM

GM

“ I had every intention of making the trip to pay respects to the man who played such a positive role in my life as a coach and friend. Unforeseen circumstances forced me to cancel my trip this morning. My thoughts are with family and friends who I looked forward to seeing. RIP DJ

Greg Moore  
67/68 season

Greg Moore - May 09, 2023 at 08:02 AM

BM

“ Rest In Peace, Warrior 🇺🇸❤️

Brad Marine - May 08, 2023 at 10:05 AM

TD

“ My deepest sympathy for the Johnson family. Being Don and Bevs neighbor they were like saroget parents to most of us kids. I remember watching the older boys play basketball with Don. He was a great guy. He will be missed.

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**Teri Carlson Dimon** - May 07, 2023 at 05:16 PM

TJ

“ My family lived next door to Mr and Mrs Johnson and I have very fond memories of growing up in that neighborhood. Mr. Johnson was very kind to all of us kids. Hugs and love to Karen and the rest of the family. ❤️ Tami Carlson Jones.

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**Tami Jones** - May 07, 2023 at 03:54 PM

LZ

“ DJ was one of my favorite people on the planet. I met the Johnson family in the late 60's as their neighborhood babysitter. Grew up with Sticks, and have been a friend of their family all these years. DJ was our HS basketball coach - I was a cheerleader - during the "pack the gym, call the cops, scream like crazy and throw your chair days" of exciting Cadillac basketball. He retired my senior year, and we were so lucky to have him and all those memories! During high school, he routinely threw me the keys to his VW convertible beetle painted up in Viking Blue and Gold...and would say "Go get the Bug...and have some fun!" Trust. Fun. Easy laugh and great stories! I made sure he was invited to all our class reunions to see "his guys". I'm sure his reunion with Bev, Sticks, Carl - and all the rest was a warm party! Peace to Karen and all the family - as you celebrate this beloved man to so many. Count me in as one who cared and adored. RIP DJ...you will certainly be missed and never forgotten. Much love...Linda Bell Ziska

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**Linda Bell Ziska** - May 06, 2023 at 07:58 PM

GK

“ Our prayers to the family. We had only known him, Beverly and Carl for a few years and we have many fond memories of them. DJ was always full of joy for his family and we are THANKFUL for having known him as long as we did. RIP Don Johnson you left many many memories for many people and a positive mark on everyone you met. BLESS YOU AND THANKS AGAIN !!  
Sue and George Klingler

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**George Klingler** - May 06, 2023 at 06:32 PM

EP

“ Dear Karen and family: DJ was such a positive presence in everyone's life. He will be greatly missed. With sympathy, The Pavkovich Family

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**Ellen Pavkovich** - May 06, 2023 at 03:01 PM

CS

“ My mother worked for Don during his time as the director of Cadillac Area Schools programs. He quickly became a family friend and was one of the best people I have ever met. Don was always friendly, quick to share a laugh, and once he knew you, he never forgot you. We have all been enriched by knowing him, and his presence left a mark not soon forgotten.

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**cathy stilwell** - May 06, 2023 at 01:37 PM

GM

“ My uncle Donald Johnson had the dryest sense of humor. He and my father Duane, his brother, were best friends and 11 months apart in age. While I am sad at his passing, I know that he is reunited with his brother, his wife, Beverly, and his two sons, Steve and Carl. Rest in Peace, DJ. We will never forget you! Love, Gayle and family.

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**Gayle Markham** - May 06, 2023 at 01:18 PM

D6

“ Whether called coach, spider or simply DJ he will always be remembered by me, the other members of our teams of 67 and 68 and the countless others lives he touched. He was driven to succeed not only in sports but in life and he instilled this in all who played for him. He also taught us that success required hard work and you better believe he worked us hard. Playing for him were some of the best years of my life and will always be remembered with great fondness.

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Dennis Johnson/ class of 68 - May 06, 2023 at 12:25 AM