

Memorial to John Granville Johnson

1932–1994

ROY E. SMITH
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

John Granville “Jess” Johnson died peacefully at home on July 6th, 1994. He had returned home from the hospital after a bout with pneumonia and seemed to be on the road to recovery when death came suddenly and unexpectedly. At the time, Jess was a professor of geology at Oregon State University.

Jess Johnson was born in Jefferson City, Missouri, on January 13, 1932. He attended UCLA for his undergraduate and graduate studies, earning his Ph.D. in geology in 1964. His undergraduate career was interrupted by a two-year stint in the Army, where he served as an aircraft control tower operator. It was during his service in the Army that Jess and Miriam were married. They had been friends since high school, but did not start dating until circumstances found them both at UCLA in the early 1950s. They were married in 1954 and were blessed with a family of five children—four daughters and one son. They were devoted to each other for 40 years.

Jess’s first interest was structural geology; he wrote his master’s thesis on the structural geology of Eureka County, Nevada. During his thesis work he acquired a reputation as a skilled and tireless field geologist. His plans to continue his structural studies were ended in 1959, however, when he contracted polio. Although his legs remained strong, his upper body was severely affected and Jess spent the rest of his life using a portable iron lung. His physical limitations did nothing, however, to lessen his enthusiasm for geology. He turned his attention to paleontology and biostratigraphy, specifically the study of Silurian and Devonian brachiopods. If he could no longer go to the evidence, the evidence would come to him. He completed his graduate studies at UCLA. His Ph.D. work was published in 1970 as Geological Society of America Memoir 121, *Great Basin Lower Devonian Brachiopoda*.

Jess went to Oregon State University in 1969 after stints at Caltech as an associate scientist and at the University of Pennsylvania as assistant professor of geology. It was at Oregon State that Jess really started to grow as a classroom lecturer and as a graduate student advisor. Those of us who were among his early graduate students were privileged to witness this growth and perhaps even to participate in it. We soon found that we not only had a thesis advisor who was genuinely interested in our development as geologists, but a friend and confidant as well. One of the daily rituals in the geology department at OSU was 3-o’clock tea in Jess’s office. It was regularly attended by his students and some of the other faculty members. It was a part of the afternoon during which we talked about our research progress and our ideas, and enjoyed Jess’s gentle humor.

Jess’s lifetime interest was Nevada geology, and he came to be recognized in the international earth science community as an authority on the Devonian of the Great Basin. He was a prolific writer, publishing 74 papers in the professional literature and co-writing 108 more. He was involved in publication on Silurian and Devonian brachiopods and associated faunas from many parts of the world. Notable among these works were manuscripts on the Devonian faunas from the Canadian Arctic, published in cooperation with his friends and colleagues from the Geological Survey of Canada.

His lifetime of scholarship was recognized by a number of awards, including the Carter award for excellence in undergraduate teaching in 1977, honorary membership in the Canadian Society of Petroleum Geology in 1987, and *Journal of Paleontology* Best Paper for 1990. He was a member of the Geological Society of America, Paleontological Society of Great Britain,

Palaeontological Association of Great Britain, and International Palaeontological Association, and he was on the Editorial Board of GSA's *Geology* from January 1976 to December 1988.

Almost all of his students worked on problems involving the Devonian of Nevada. It was interesting and exciting work, in no small part because Jess's enthusiasm for Great Basin geology was passed on to all of us. His students left Oregon State with an appreciation for hard work and attention to detail, even a tolerance for the drudgery that is sometimes a necessary part of scientific research, characteristics that could serve us well in later professional life. Jess Johnson was for many of us a lifetime mentor. He was truly one of the good guys, and he will be greatly missed.

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3300 Penrose Place • P.O. Box 9140 • Boulder, Colorado 80301

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