



IN MEMORIAM

Harry William Johnson, Jr.
Professor of Chemistry, Emeritus
UC Riverside
1927 - 2007

Harry W. Johnson, Jr., the son of second generation Swedish immigrants, was a native of Central Florida, among the orange groves about equidistant from Kissimmee and Tampa. He was born in Waverly, Florida on January 2, 1927. After graduating from Lake Wales High School in 1945 he served in the U.S. Army at Camp Crowder, Missouri, and Washington D.C. decoding enemy communications. After his Army service, he proceeded to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he received his S.B. degree in chemistry in 1951 and graduated Phi Beta Kappa. He did graduate studies at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, where he completed his Ph.D. in organic chemistry in 1954 under the direction of Professor David Y. Curtin. His Ph.D. thesis concerned the mechanism of one of the famous name reactions in organic chemistry, the para- Claisen Rearrangement. He joined as instructor in the Division of Physical Sciences as one of its original chemistry faculty members at the University of California, Riverside in fall, 1954. Harry retired from the UCR faculty at the end of 1989.

Harry was a long time member of the American Chemical Society as well as other professional organizations. His UCR research focused on structural and mechanistic organic chemistry, which included studies of hetero-aromatic organometallic compounds and acid- base chemistry. He also co- authored with Professor Emeritus George Helmkamp a well known undergraduate organic chemistry laboratory text, "Selected Experiments in Organic Chemistry." Without doubt, Harry's most lasting contribution has been his service to the Department and Campus. During the early years of the newly created Department of Chemistry (1960) and its Graduate Program, Harry, an associate professor, stepped in as departmental chair (1963-66). This unusual action, triggered by a sudden resignation in a department apparently suffering from growing pains, reflects Harry's calming influence in an administrative role. This also reflected the high esteem he had achieved among his colleagues. It came as no surprise then that after a brief stint as Assistant Vice Chancellor for Research (1973-74), Harry was appointed as Graduate Dean, a post he held for six years (1974-1980). He continued his association with Graduate Division as Associate Dean (in 1981 after a one year hiatus) until his retirement in 1989. The period of his leadership in the Graduate Division coincided with the period of rapid growth in the number and size of graduate programs throughout the campus and with the development of graduate program evaluations, all of which benefited greatly from Harry's judicious and fair implementation.

Time and time again it was heard from students, staff and faculty that Harry was a nice guy, possessed a boisterous, infectious laugh, and exhibited a calm demeanor with exceptional patience. And, in contrast, Harry could be a no nonsense kind of individual who was capable of being blunt. He was said to profess to a young faculty member that he would be fired if he did not do good research. And, in virtually the same breath, Harry indicated that this young faculty member would also be fired if he did not do a good job teaching. But he also informed faculty members what great research they had accomplished as reported in recent papers he had read. He also kindly praised a young, newly hired secretary some forty years ago for what a great job she did in typing her first scientific manuscript, not a small task in the days before computers and photocopying machines.

Aside from his UCR association, some of the chemistry faculty best remember Harry as an avid fisherman, most notably on the LaJollan down in San Diego or at the Arcularius Ranch north of Bishop. One member of this committee shared living quarters with Harry about 50 years ago, and another shared an office complex in Pierce Hall with Harry for many years. Thus, it was easy to recollect what a fine influence he had on this campus. And there was George Helmkamp, Harry's long time friend and associate. George, an organic chemistry faculty member who arrived at UCR shortly before Harry, was also an enthusiastic fisherman. It became clear later on that Harry, a member of the Sierra Club, had many other hobbies including photography, bird watching, rock hounding, often traveling around in his signature camper. He was a member of the First Congregational Church of Riverside and was also a member of PFLAG.

During his long battle with myositis, a disease that causes severe muscle deterioration, Harry was under the care of his personal physician, who was also his former student. Several other former organic chemistry students, who are now doctors, assisted him during his illness. The night he passed away, one of his attending physicians was also a former student. He remembered Harry as a demanding but fair teacher, whose teaching stayed with him through his career as a doctor. Harry always said organic chemistry classes should not be easy because he "did not want a doctor who did not understand what he or she was doing." Thus his role in the emergence of the Biomedical Sciences Program did result in quality physicians returning to serve the community.

Harry passed away at the age of 80 on December 18, 2007 in Riverside after a heroic, 14- year battle with inclusion body myositis. Although incapacitated by ill health in recent years, he remained active in the Myositis Association. He is survived by Margaret, his wife of 50 years, and his three daughters: Anne Johnston (Chicago, Illinois), Jill Johnson- Young (Riverside) and Gail MacMillan (Riverside) and their spouses Robert Johnston, Linda Johnson- Young and Kevin MacMillan. His grandchildren include Sandy and Isaac Johnston, Kerry and Chloe Johnson- Young, and Natalie and Linnea MacMillan. His parents, Harry W. Johnson, Sr. and Effie Johnson, and his sister, Patricia, preceded him in death.

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