



## George Wesley Johnson

April 28, 1932 - November 16, 2018

George Wesley Johnson, Jr  
1932 - 2018

George Wesley Johnson, Jr, husband of Marian Ashby Johnson and father of Cynthia (CiCi), Carolyn (Kye), George III, and Benjamin, and grandfather of 17 grand/great-grandchildren passed away peacefully of natural causes at age 86, surrounded by loved ones on Friday, November 16, 2018. Though Wes was primarily proud of his family, he might have been more well-known for his extraordinary life and notable academic achievements.

An extremely gifted writer, educator, orator, editor, and cartoonist, Wes, at age 9, created his own weekly 5-cent neighborhood news publication. Throughout High School (North Phoenix) as junior and senior class presidents, he wrote, edited, and created cartoons that poked good-humoredly at the staff and student body.

Wes was accepted to attend Harvard University, but – unthinkable – asked the admissions department to defer enrollment for a year so he could attend Brigham Young University in the footsteps of his parents and, like his father, rushed the Samuel Hall Society as a Goldbricker. For his sophomore year, Wes continued his education at Harvard and served on the Harvard Lampoon, where he worked with a number of influential writers, editors, and thinkers, including John Updike. In his junior year, he deferred his studies for 2½ years to serve a mission in Belgium and France for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While serving a mission, Wes became interested in French history and culture.

After graduating from Harvard, Wes completed a PhD in History at Columbia University and advanced studies at the University of Paris-Sorbonne. In New York, he met and married a beautiful young lady from Utah, Marian Ashby. During his career, Wes was awarded Ford and Rockefeller Foundation grants among many others that impacted his work in West African, Public, Business, Urban, and Latter-day Saint histories. His pivotal work on the French-speaking, West-African country of Senegal made a significant impact

on the dialogue of African Americans that he was working with in New York and in France. During his career, Wes wrote many books and articles and founded two successful academic journals that continue to the present, including Dialogue, A Journal of Mormon Thought (along with Eugene England) and The Public Historian: Official Journal of The National Council for Public History (University of California Press).

During his career, Wes taught at Stanford University, University of California-Santa Barbara, Arizona State University, and Brigham Young University. After retiring from BYU in 1997, Wes continued his work on the Outmigration Project by focusing on Mormons outmigrating from the Mormon corridor in 20th and 21st centuries.

Wes promoted the incalculable value of history, and what it meant to religions, businesses, and families. He mentored dozens of graduate students through the years, many of whom were grateful and credited him for the completion of their theses and dissertations. He was a real-life Indiana Jones, in that he was a teacher, but also someone who loved the adventure of doing real-life research in the field.

Many have said Wes was one of the smartest people they have ever known, having an unmatched command of European, West African, and American contexts. He inspired others with his imagination and creativity. In short, he was a visionary.

As a father, he was always there for his children. He offered a listening ear, invited lively discussion, and facilitated decisions. He could draw a dead-on caricature of just about any silly face you could think of, told amazing stories of Bushy Tail and The Night Before Christmas, knew how to dress beautifully, could walk faster and farther through any museum, hated sweeping or turning anything with a screwdriver, wore his sweater inside out and backwards (just to test you), and could forgive you of just about anything if you gave him an hour or two to digest it. He was tireless and never complained about how hard he was working, because after all, he wasn't working because he was living his passion! He made everyone else around him feel like they were standing still, even if they were working like mad. We will miss him terribly, but his energy, his crazy, ridiculous demand for more and for better will always be with us. Perhaps the greatest lesson he taught us was this, "Long shots are never as long as you think; they're always worth going after. Why the he-- not?" Thanks Dad!

Services in honor of Wes will be held at the Edgemont 14th Ward Meeting House, 4220 Foothill Dr., Provo. The viewing will take place on Tuesday, November 20, 2018 from 9:45 to 10:45am with funeral services at 11:00am.

# Cemetery

# Events

Provo City Cemetery

Provo, UT,

NOV	Funeral Services	11:00AM
20	<div>Edgemont 14th Ward</div> <div>4220 Foothill Drive, Provo, UT, US</div>	

# Comments

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“ I will miss you Uncle Wes. I always loved the dialogue with you and the great advice you always gave. You also told the best stories. Thanks so much for a wonderful life. Bill.

**Bill Strong** - November 22 at 09:51 PM

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“ Wes was like a second dad to me. He treated me as one of his own whenever I was around. He and his wife graciously fed me meals, took me on their annual trips to Newport Beach, and put up with all my mischief. I always loved his sense of humor and the passion he had for life. I still remember how he would always correct my grammar in hilarious ways. I now do the same to my own kids. He was so generous, as well. I will never forget how they provided their condo in St George to my wife and me, as poor newlyweds, for our honeymoon.

**Marco** - November 20 at 12:41 AM

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“ I first met Wes when we were both missionaries in France. We discussed starting Dialogue in Spring 1965 when he was on the Stanford University faculty and I was a graduate student there. Over the years we have been in touch. Wes is a role model for the combination of intellect and spirituality, one we all should emulate. I will miss him. Our best to you, Marion. You match him in qualities, and have been an ideal companion.

Phillip & Ruth Ann Smith

**Phillip Smith** - November 19 at 02:57 PM

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“ We loved and admired Wes. Our fathers were friends at BYU many decades ago, and we carried on that multi-generational friendship. He was always engaging, always vigorous, always warm. Our love to the family and especially to you Marian.

Richard and Claudia Bushman

**Richard Bushman** - November 19 at 10:51 AM

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“ As I skimmed over the obituary page in the newspaper, I saw a picture of an extraordinarily kind looking man. I only wish I could have met him in person. Such a lucky family, friends and associates to be part of his life.

**inger Russell** - November 18 at 03:28 PM