



Donald E. Johnson

March 6, 1930 - June 24, 2023

Donald Eugene Johnson was born on a farm outside the small town of Granite Falls, MN on March 26, 1930 to the proud parents of William and Agnes Johnson. Don had an older brother, Darold "Smiley", and two younger, twin, brothers, Lee and Lyle. All three brothers preceded him in death, Lyle passing at only a few months old.

Don went to country school his first few years and always joked that he had to walk three miles to and from school, uphill both ways. Don was confirmed at the age of 15 at the Granite Falls Lutheran Church and graduated from Granite Falls High School in 1948. He had a love for sports, especially fast pitch softball and begged his dad for the opportunity to play baseball in high school. However, his dad said that he needed the help on the farm before and after school as Don's older brother, five years older, had enlisted in World War II and Don's younger brother, 10 years younger, was not old enough to do all that was needed around the farm. Don lost his mother to cancer at the age of 18, in 1948. He told the story of when the county came to take his younger brother, Lee, after their mother passed because they did not think he could be raised properly by a widowed father who already had his hands full running a farm. Don said that when the county people showed up his dad stood in the driveway with a shotgun and said "No one is taking my son from me."

Don joined the Air Force in 1951 after word had come from a family friend that his

number was coming up in the draft and, if he didn't want to be in the Army, now was the time to join another branch of the service. After basic training in Texas, Don was stationed on the island of Okinawa for most of his time in the Air Force. He was listed as clerical however worked on the line when the fighter jets took off and landed, and also stood many nights of guard duty. He liked to tell a story of the time a pilot asked if he wanted to go for a ride as the pilots needed to have so many flight hours; he eagerly took the pilot up on the offer. It was a beautiful flight until the pilot decided to do some loop de loops and barrel rolls. When he told the pilot he wasn't feeling the best, the pilot said "you better not lose it in that helmet as it's the General's."

After his four-year stint in the service Don went back to Granite Falls where he loved to work on the farm with his dad. He also helped an uncle with his truck farm, graded roads, and held other odd jobs to make a few bucks. He was never one to be idle for long. He then decided to attend meat cutter school after which he took a job in a meat shop in southern MN. He soon missed home and went to work at the Piggly Wiggly in Willmar in the meat department. There he met his future bride, Ethel Bartel, as she worked at Piggly Wiggly as a cashier, and they were married on June 26, 1960. When they informed Piggly Wiggly that they were getting married, the manager told them they could not both work in the same store as a married couple. They first found jobs in Austin, MN, and from there moved to an apartment in Minneapolis. Don took a job with Christman Sausage Company. He worked as a salesman and had a route in the rural area surrounding the Twin Cities which allowed him to be home every night. Along came the first of three children, Tom. After a few years Don and his wife had saved enough to purchase a home and moved to Brooklyn Center, MN, where they welcomed two more children, Pam and Patti, to complete their family. Don later worked for Red Owl and SuperValu for 20 plus years and retired in 1992. He had a strong work ethic and continued to work part time for SuperValu for a number of years after that.

Don had a wonderful grandson, Zachary, who made his grandfather very proud. Zach and his wife, Samantha, have three kids, Ryley, Bailey, and Finn, and Don enjoyed talking, playing, and being in their company whenever possible. Don had a total of three grandchildren, and nine great grandchildren.

Don loved working around the house, taking pride in a nice green, well-kept yard and also growing flowers anywhere and everywhere: peonies, coneflowers, zinnias, gerbera daisies, petunias and many other beautiful flowers. He also loved the birds and had many bird feeders and a couple of birdbaths for them to enjoy. The house had a small, but nice, screened porch that they both loved to sit in and enjoy the outside during the spring, summer, and fall.

Don and his wife lived in their home for 55 years and in 2018 moved into a senior independent apartment complex about three miles from their house. It took a lot of convincing to get Don to move as he loved his porch, flowers, and putzing in the garage. He soon made new friends and partook in the offered activities, especially Bingo. Don loved to gamble. He loved to play the lottery, Powerball, Mega Millions, Daily Three, scratch offs, which his kids and grandson were forever taking him to buy or buying for him. Football season meant buying numbers on the games and, believe it or not, he won

more often than not. Some say he carried a horseshoe in his pocket.

Don was an avid outdoorsman and loved to fish, hunt, and just get out and enjoy nature. He enjoyed hunting deer and pheasants near his home town and in later years ventured to South Dakota and Iowa for pheasants as well. Many a hunting trip was taken with his son Tom, and his brothers Smiley and Lee, and Don's wife would always load up the picnic basket with sandwiches, apple pie, brownies, etc., as well as a thermos full of coffee. He always spoke fondly of those trips and said that it was much more enjoyable being with family and enjoying nature than it was to put something in the game bag.

Don's love of family was second to none. He loved to visit his aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, in-laws, and anyone else. He loved to talk about family and who was related to who and who lived where and always had many questions. He was the unofficial historian of the family and who knows how many untold stories or memories were lost when he passed.

Don loved going to the Minnesota State Fair and, together with his son, went to more than 50 years of State Fairs. He enjoyed getting to the Fair when the gates opened at 6:00 am, having a nice big breakfast and then looking over all of the farm equipment before exploring all of the buildings, and picking up as much "free" stuff as possible. To know Don was to know that he never threw anything away and always kept things in good order and usually in the original box. Pack rat? Hoarder? Let's just say he was a product of the Depression and Don never saw something he did not like and kept it until the day it would once again be useful.

This could go on and on for many pages but let's just say Don loved his family and friends, enjoyed mixing with nature, the lottery, State Fair, sweets of any kind, hunting, fishing, and many other things.

He will be greatly missed. Know that when his wife, children, grandchildren, or great grandchildren give a knowing chuckle or laugh, or share a story, that they are thinking of the man that at times seemed larger than life.

Survived by wife, Ethel; son, Tom (Carrie); daughters: Pam (Mike Stachowski) and Patti (Paul Koch); grandson Zach (Samantha); three great grandchildren: Ryley, Bailey and Finley; and extended family and friends. He was a wonderful husband, dad, grandpa and grandpa great.

Funeral service Friday 11 am at The Lutheran Church of the Triune God in Brooklyn Center. Visitation an hour prior to the service. Interment at Granite Falls, MN City Cemetery. Memorials to the donor's preferred charity.

Visitation



Friday, July 7th 10 AM



The Lutheran Church of the Triune God, 5827 N Humboldt Ave, Brooklyn Center, MN

[Driving Directions](#)

Memorial Service



Friday, July 7th 11 AM



The Lutheran Church of the Triune God, 5827 N Humboldt Ave, Brooklyn Center, MN

[Driving Directions](#)