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WARSAW, N.C.

John Anderson Johnson

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JOHN ANDERSON JOHNSON (front left) of Warsaw was ordained Sunday by the Warsaw Baptist Church, on approval of the Ordination Council of the Eastern Baptist Association. The Rev. **Jimmy Johnson** (front right), a longtime family friend from Wallace who is pastor of Concord Baptist, delivered the ordination address. John A. Johnson is a retired Clerk of Superior Court, is currently interim pastor at Warsaw Baptist, and has been a lay minister for over 40 years. Shown with Johnson at his home on East Plank Street are three of his four children (L-R): Bill, Mary Best Reichard, and Tracy. Family members not pictured are son Johnny of Charlotte, who also attended the service; and John A. Johnson's wife Helen, of the family home.

Minister, Clerk of Court, and Everyone's Good-Humor Man for All Seasons

John A. Johnson Survived F

by Bill Rollins
Associate Editor

John Anderson Johnson lay in a ditch beside US Hwy. 117 in Magnolia at mid-day on New Year's Eve 1949, covered and presumed dead after one of the most infamous wrecks in Duplin County history.

But Johnson, 24 at the time, had a calling he had yet to fully hear, and when his life was spared he set about answering it.

The Warsaw Fire Department truck in which he had been riding was going through Magnolia, lights flashing and siren blaring, on the way to a fire in Rose Hill.

Then a car pulled out from a side street and the fire truck struck it, throwing Johnson as high as the telephone wires, and into the ditch near driver Stacy Britt. The fire truck catapulted side-over-side several times, also throwing free the other two firemen on the truck, James Norwood West and Billy Bartlett.

Britt, the fire chief, died at the scene. But RN Helen Anne Straughan, wife of Dr. Bill Straughan, discovered Johnson was still breathing. She rode in the ambulance and held Johnson's head all the way to James Walker Hospital in Wilmington, praying he would live to get treatment.

"He not only lived," said fellow minister Jimmy Johnson, perhaps his best friend, "he lived for others."

John A. Johnson was in the hospital for weeks with a concussion, a fractured skull and fractured shoulder. The latter would be a bother the rest of his long life.

Bartlett stayed a while, too, with a fractured shoulder and broken jaw. West was treated in Warsaw for leg and hip injuries.

And when John Anderson Johnson died at age 74 in his home at 115 East Plank Road in Warsaw on August 28, by all accounts, he had used well the half-century of life he'd been spared that New Year's Eve.

Britt's widow, Eula Lee—who was Warsaw Town Clerk at the time of the accident and received the call about the fire—moved the family shortly, and the Johnson and Britt children never met.

But when John Anderson died last month, his wife Helen and their four children—Johnny, Mary

15 of Johnson's Interim Pastorates

John Anderson Johnson's children found a list he had compiled, apparently in the past year or so, of his interim pastorates. It appeared to be in order, first to last, with no dates.

1. Wells Chapel
2. Faison Presbyterian
3. Penderlea (2 interims)
4. Willard
5. Faison (2)
6. Mt. Holly
7. Bear Marsh (4)
8. Faison Baptist
9. Warsaw Baptist (3)
10. Shiloh Baptist
11. Corinth Baptist (3)
12. Rose Hill Baptist
13. Dobson Chapel
14. Magnolia Baptist (4)
15. Concord Baptist (4)

County as anyone.

And in this celebration of his life, family and friends took time to talk about how he touched them, about his ability to react to calamity with reason, and about the humor that laced his life and his sermons.

Preacher, Public Servant

Johnson was already leaning toward public life at the time of the accident, when he already was assistant chief. That leaning came, perhaps, from his father, State Senator Rivers D. Johnson Sr.

John Anderson got out of that hospital in Wilmington and continued to ride fire trucks with the Warsaw VFD for some years, and was with the department for a total of 40 years, including serving as its chief. He was a member of numerous civic clubs, served on the Warsaw town commission, and was appointed county tax collector for eight years. Johnson was elected Clerk of Court in 1970, and was elected to six consecutive terms until he retired in 1994.

His call to the ministry unfolded more slowly. He was a deacon and Sunday School teacher at Warsaw Baptist Church, where he was a lifetime member, and was a lay minister until 1973, when he was licensed by his church to preach the gospel.



A FAMILY MOMENT—John Anderson Johnson and wife Helen, grand Bill and Tracy, and daughter Mary Best's daughter.



A GOOD LAUGH AND A HITCH—Johnson shares a good one with the former Lisa Jones, who married him in 1973.

Best, Tracy and Bill—received a card from the three Britt siblings—Jo-Ann, Eddie and Betty. It spoke of how their lives had been forever joined by that accident.

John Anderson's life as an interim and supply pastor, and as Clerk of Superior Court, touched perhaps as many people in Duplin

He was interim pastor for at least 15 churches, covering at least 30 terms, and was supply pastor for at least 65. On the Fourth of July this year, he completed a 16-month interim term at Warsaw Baptist, his third interim there.

Driving Dad ...

John Anderson Johnson Jr.—Johnny, now 46—remembers a time during high school when he drove his dad to his "preaching gigs. He'd get his notes straight, and sometimes we'd talk about things. You know, we might not have talked much during the week, so it was our catchup time."

Johnny, a salesman for a company that makes ladies' footwear, also remembers driving his dad somewhere else: Crazy.

"There was this time when I was a kid," he said last week, "when I got in trouble playing baseball behind the old elementary school. Some of the guys could hit the ball on top of the school building, and

we'd go up to the second floor and stack up tables and climb up there.

"Well, one time, I put my foot on light fixture and an entire row of fluorescent lights came crashing down. The janitor, Mr. Ezzell I think, saw us, and pretty soon, I'm in (principal) Bill Taylor's office. He tore my butt up, they did that back then, and sent me packing. Then I got home had and to deal with John A.

"But he just said, 'Son, if you can turn your stumbling blocks into stepping stones, you can profit from this.' Man, that was an humbling thing to hear.

"As time went on, I grew my hair down to (here) and was doing all kinds of stuff, listening to rock'n'roll, Jimmy Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, The Doors, and getting into trouble. So those talks got to be kind of a regular thing.

"But you know, even then, I got the feeling Dad trusted me enough, and thought I was smart enough to get through it, and he was right ... more or less.

"The thing about Dad was, he was never judgmental. He was patient and loving before he was stern. He was always about human beings. I never heard him criticize anyone, or speak badly of anyone. He was a selfless and devoted public servant, a man of God and a man of his family.

"I think about him now, and I couldn't carry his dirty socks.

"I used to get mad at him, wanted him to make some money and get famous. That wasn't him. He didn't want a big church and a big check.

"He was happiest when he was at Willard or Penderlea, out in the country where the rubber hits the road. He loved people who were the salt of the earth, hard-working people. He loved people who wanted to get closer to God, and he wanted to help them get there.

"I've had to grow into an appreciation for who he was, and the last 10 years or so, I think I have. And upon my father's death, I fully realized his legacy."

Living the Legacy

Jimmy Johnson of Wallace saw that legacy up close. So close, he and John Anderson were often mistaken for brothers.

When Jimmy Johnson preached John Johnson's ordination service in September 1998, he said, "I suppose we do look somewhat alike, but of course, he is not my blood brother. I had a different mother, but we had the same spiritual father."

They got to be friends in the

Note of Thanks

Perhaps you sent a lovely card
or sat quietly in a chair.

Perhaps you sent a floral piece,
If so we saw it there.

Perhaps you spoke the kindest
words

As any friend could say.

Perhaps you were not here at
all,

Just thought of us today.

Whatever you did to console
our hearts,

We thank you so much,
whatever the part

From the Family of
Freddie Dawson, Jr.

Check our full line
of office supplies at
**ENTERPRISE OFFICE
OUTFITTERS**
109 N. College St.
Wallace

NOTICE TO DUPLIN VOTERS

Any voter who wishes to report a correction or change of their voter status must do so on or before October 8.

If you need to report a name or address change, you may do so by either filling out a voter registration application or by sending a signed letter to the Duplin County Board of Elections Office, P.O. Box 975, Kenansville, NC 28349.

If you need to report a party affiliation change, you are required by law to complete a voter registration application.

Voter registration applications may be picked up at the Board of Elections Office, Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Absolutely no changes will be made over the phone.

Rosemary L. Futrell
Duplin County Director of Elections

Fire-Truck Crash to Serve



erson Johnson's family gathered
1994 for his retirement after 24
ourt. (L-R): son Johnny, John
daughter Carmen Blanton, sons
y Best Reichard. Carmen is Mary



OF HIS PANTS—John Anderson
n Bill Jones of Wallace, father of
ried Johnson's son Bill in 1998.

"In the Event of My Death ..."

On July 21, 1984, John Anderson Johnson wrote some poignant instructions to his children:

1. Thank God for all His blessings to me—and—to us as a family.
2. Call Community Funeral Home. Tell them to have my body cremated.
3. Plan a memorial service at the Warsaw Baptist Church. Any pastor, minister, and/or preacher of your choice will suit me—I will not complain. Please! No sad songs, no melodramatic speeches. Find some humor, some joy, and some reason to rejoice together.
4. Keep it simple. Keep happy. Above all else, keep your eye on our Christ.
5. Bury my ashes at Pinecrest on the lot with my Daddy. Do this with the family only—my brothers and their families and in-laws. This really should not be a big thing, a prayer, scripture—close it with dirt and go home.
6. Please know and ever remember that I love each of you with a very special love and affection. My greatest wish and desire for each of you is that you give my Lord and Christ first place in your life.

I love you!!!
Daddy

which his children came of age, Jimmy Johnson calmly said:

"I don't think he was oblivious to what was going on at all, because he would share some of his pain as a parent. But I think what Johnny said is right—I don't think he ever lost faith in any of them.

"He'd say, 'Jimmy, if we train them right, the Bible says they'll turn out all right.'"

And They Did

Mary Best Reichard, 44, was librarian at James Kenan High the past several years, while husband Don Reichard was president of James Sprunt Community College. Now she is librarian at Clayton Middle School, and he's president of Johnston Community College. Their daughter Carmen Blanton, 15, is a sophomore at Clayton High.

Tracy, 42, is a computer analyst with Carolina Turkeys.

Bill, 39, celebrated his first wedding anniversary last weekend—his dad had performed the ceremony. Bill works in Wallace with his wife, the former Lisa Jones, at her family's insurance agency.

Mary Best, like brother Johnny, also remembers that daddy usually trusted her to make the right decisions. Perhaps with exceptions in her hippie-like attire, and ways, in the 1970s. And one time

"Get that—"He wanted to make me feel better."

Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow

Johnson also was a good-humor man around the courthouse.

There are good stories: from Bertha Whaley, who worked for him 24 years and succeeded him as Clerk; and from Sandy Williams, who witnessed the fire-truck accident as a child in Magnolia, and who worked with him a long time.

"When he had cancer and went for chemotherapy," said Whaley, "he asked them if he'd lose his hair. A nurse told him yes, and he asked how soon, and she told him it varied.

"Next morning, she walked into his room and he was bald. She said, 'Mr. Johnson! I had no idea you'd lose it that fast!' Then he reached under his pillow and pulled out his toupe."

Williams told about when she applied for the clerk's-office job.

"I hadn't seen him in several years and didn't recognize him," she remembered. "I said, 'Mr. Johnson, you look different.'"

"He said, 'I've got hair now! And it's my own—I bought it!'"

"He was such a good guy to work for, and I'm proud to have had him as my friend."

Whaley said that when her

1960s, often crossing paths, and churches, in what Jimmy Johnson referred to as "our bivocational ministries." Jimmy J. taught school-bus drivers in several counties, including Duplin.

They met several times a week for lunch, often for shrimp at the Wagon Wheel in Beulaville.

"We were pretty much natured alike," said Jimmy Johnson. "John loved humor, and he and I have been known for having jokes in our sermons—we had to watch that, because we preached for so many of the same congregations."

Jimmy J. said John J. was the perfect interim pastor.

"Sometimes when you do interim work," he said, "you have to do lot of healing and putting back together. He was just real good at gathering people and having them pull together."

"And I think what he did at Warsaw Baptist is a unique thing, going back into a 'home' situation where they *know* you—several (three) times—and having the ability to work with them. It takes a special person to pull the positive out of that."

Dot Rollins, a former deacon at Warsaw Baptist, remembers she and her late husband Glenn joining John Anderson and Helen, and more than one former pastor's family, for coffee and dessert after church on Sunday nights in the 1950s and '60s.

"John Anderson could preach a sermon that would just tell you, if you didn't have Christ, you were doomed. He was doing that this last time he was our interim pastor (March 1998-June 1999)."

No. 1 Estate "Lawyah"

Jimmy Johnson remembered something else.

"John could listen to diverse opinions, and could disagree without being dogmatic. He had the ability to be compassionate with people, but also to be realistic and point them in the right direction."

"One thing that always struck me about John Anderson, as Clerk of Court, was that he would never, even with us as close as we were, never violate the privacy of whoever he may be working with."

His oldest brother, Rivers D. Johnson Jr., a Warsaw lawyer who died in April, liked to say, in his oratorical drawl: "There are two great estate lawyahs in Duplin County, and the first is John Anderson Johnson."

When it was suggested that John Anderson might not have known exactly what to make of the era in

later, when he left she particularly needed direction.

"I'd graduated from UNCW," she said while looking for family photos and bits of its history, "and I was waitressing at Wrightsville Beach. I'd been doing that awhile, and one time when Mom and Daddy came down, Daddy said, 'Mary Best, I think it's time you got the (heck) out of Wrightsville Beach.' That's when I went on to East Carolina to get my master's degree (in library science). I moved back to Wrightsville later, but then it was okay."

Tracy told several stories about fatherly discipline.

"What I think of when I think of Daddy," he said, rocking on the front porch of the family home, "is kinda the hints he gave me coming along. He used to always say, 'Keep your eyes upon the doughnut, not upon the hole.'"

"And I remember, from the time I was real little, he used to always say to never look down upon a man like he's of lower status than you. ... And that every man was superior to you, in that you might learn something from him."

But something that hit home strongest for Tracy happened when he was grown.

"Pop could say a whole lot with very few words," he said, "and we were out at my farm near Magnolia, cleaning up the place, and people had been vandalizing the house. I had collected a whole bunch of guns, some I'd built, and I was a pretty good shot, and I was threatening to lay out in the tobacco barn and ambush whoever it was, you know, scare 'em slam to death."

"Daddy, he kept raking and let me go on and on, and after a while he stopped and looked at me and said, 'Yeah, gettin' shot at ain't no fun.'"

"And I could see exactly what he was talking about, because I had never been shot at, and he'd been shot at in a bomber in World War II. I could see in his eyes what he was talking about."

John Anderson was not only known for humor in his sermons, but also in daily life.

"It's been a while now," said number one son Johnny, "but I remember when he went into the hospital for a hemorrhoidectomy and wound up being diagnosed with colon cancer and having a colostomy. Next day, I walked into his room, you know, 'Dad—how are you!'"

"He said, 'I'm doing all right, son, but I never thought I'd see the day I could look down at my stomach and see my (backside).'"

former boss died, she got e-mail from all over the state from his peers, and most of it mentioned how much he had helped them when they were starting out.

And people still walk into the office to tell how much he helped them at one point or another.

"That still happens, I'd say at least once a week," she said.

Portrait of My Love

For Johnson's retirement in December 1994, his wife had Warsaw artist Jill Adams paint his portrait. John Anderson liked it so much, he commissioned Adams to paint one of Helen for her birthday this year.

"John Anderson was so excited about it," said Adams. "He and Mary Best picked out some photos, and we took her hairdo from one, her smile from another, the different features, and created a picture he liked."

"He was so easy to please, but he didn't want any fancy background. And there was a flower on the dress, and he had me leave that off. He just wanted Helen."

When Adams saw Johnson in the post office three weeks before Helen's birthday, and told him the portrait was finished, he gave her a big hug.

John Anderson died less than two weeks before his wife's birthday, which was September 8. Their children still had the birthday party they'd planned for their mother, and that evening, Adams went around the block with her husband Jerry and presented the portrait.

"I was holding Helen's hand," Jill said, "and she gave me a squeeze. Such a dear, sweet person."

A Difficult Year

In the last year of his life, John Anderson Johnson continued to deal with his wife Helen's debilitating illness, diagnosed in 1994, and had recently agreed to have her admitted to hospice care.

He also buried his two older brothers this year: Rivers, who was 77; and Vivian B. "Hawk" Johnson of Cary, who was 76.

All three passed naturally, within about four months. Rivers, April 25. Hawk, July 21. Then John Anderson, August 28.

"You could tell it got to him when Uncle Hawk died, too," said Mary Best.

"We were telling him not to dwell on it," said Johnny, "and I didn't say this to him, but you know, what were the chances?"

"All he said was, 'Well, I hope I've got a few more years.'"