



L. Jay Johnson

MAR 17, 2007



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L Jay Johnson, age 83, of Centerville died Saturday, March 17, 2007 at Mercy Medical Center, Centerville. L. Jay Johnson was born the son of Eurus and Mary Elizabeth ""Betty"" (Pittman) Johnson, in Exline, Iowa. He was the youngest of seven sons; Nova 1903-1975, Keith (Curley) 1905-1971, Hugh (Hank) 1909-1982, Earnest (Bill) 1914-1965, Harold (Brownie) 1917-1993, Eurus Jr. (J.R.) 1920-1972 and L. Jay 1924-2007. The house where he was born in is no longer there, but was located on Main Street in Exline. L. Jay started 1st grade in September 1929 and graduated from Exline High School in May 1941. His first job out of high school was a delivery boy for Tip Top Food Market in Centerville, Iowa. He worked sixty hours a week for \$10. His \$10 a week bought him his first car, a 1931 Chevrolet for \$125.00 that was financed through Odea Finance Company in Des Moines, Iowa. L. Jay's second job was with Jennings Christofer Wholesale grocery house just off the N.E. corner of square. He worked five days for \$18. In the mean time, World War II had started and on December 11, 1942 Bob Johnson, Julius Dove Jr. and L. Jay went to Des Moines to enlist in the Army. At that time the Air Force was a branch of the Army. ""I can still close my eyes and see my mother and dad standing in our house in Exline watching me walk away on that foggy morning. It was more than a year before I ever saw them again."" L. Jay was the fifth son to join the service, Curley in the Navy, Bill in the Army Engineers, Brownie in the Infantry and J.R. in the Navy. L. Jay's first Air Force assignment was to St. Petersburg, FL. for basic training. ""I was so homesick I could hardly stand it."" He sent a picture to his parents of him swimming in the Gulf of Mexico on Christmas Day. From St. Petersburg he went to Seymour Johnson Field in Goldsboro, North Carolina to Aircraft Mechanic School, from there back to Fort Meyers, Fl. for Arial Gunnery School. Next he went to Rattlesnake bomber base at Pyote, Texas for Combat Training and assignment to a crew, then to Grand Island, NE, where he was assigned a brand new B-17 Bomber. He flew a plane to England to



Presque Isle, to Maine, to Coos Bay, to Labrador and then to Rekovick, Iceland. From the Wash they were assigned to the 94th Bomb Group 332nd squadron of the 8th Air Force. Their commanding General was Jimmy Doolittle, which led the first bombing raid on Tokio, Japan by flying B-25 bombers off an aircraft carrier. All of his twenty-five missions were flown from the base at Bury St. Edmunds England called Red Grave, about ninety miles north of London. After twenty-five missions they were re-assigned back to the United States on a troop ship, USS General Black. He spent thirteen days on the ocean finally landing at Pier 51 in New York City and then trained from New Jersey to St. Louis, MO. He got a twenty-one day delay in route to go home and then reported in to Santa Anna, California where he was to be assigned to Rotary Wing Helicopter School and go on to South Pacific. While they were at Santa Anna they came out with a point system for discharge, so L. Jay was on his way back to Jefferson Barracks, Miss. for discharge on June 26, 1945 as a Tech. Sgt., European Theater ribbon with five major battles and Air Metal with four oak leaf clusters. L. Jay's first job out of the service was with Morris-Knutson Construction Co. He helped relocate the Rock Island Railroad and turned it into the Appanoose County Railroad in just a few months. Soon after getting out of the service his brother Hank asked him to work in the funeral home, which led to Embalming School at St. Louis. On October 19, 1946 L. Jay married Dolores E. Bartle in Ames, Iowa. She preceded him in death September 17, 2000. Their first home was an apartment at 604 N. 8th St., from there they lived at Aunt Audrey's apartment on 545 N. Main and later bought the house at 431 E. Maple from Arch Richardson for \$5,000 and paid him \$250 over six months. From this union we had one son, Byron Johnson. He was a licensed Funeral Director since 1948, former owner of Johnson Funeral Home, Centerville. He was associated with Johnson Funeral Home as an employee and half owner until he sold out to Tom Lange. He and Tom Lange started the Thomas Lange Funeral Home in 2001, where he was still practicing at the time of his death. He served over 7000 families in his career. Meanwhile they bought their home at 510 W. Maple from Ted Oehler for \$27,000. L. Jay then served as Mayor for about eighteen months to fill out Vern Mott's term. L. Jay lowered his Mayor's salary to what he could earn on social security-that made ABC's National news. He then



went to work for Hawkeye Bank, December 4, 1989 as a Public Relation Officer. He was a member of the Iowa Funeral Directors Association, National Funeral Directors Association, Appanoose Country Club, past member of the Lions Club. He was Chairman of Pancake Day where the funeral home always had a calliope in the Pancake Day Parade. He started the Centerville Junior Jaycees. He was a member of the Centerville Chamber of Commerce. L. Jay started cleaning the square Saturday mornings when he was Mayor and continued to do that as his health allowed. "" I've had a good life- a wonderful wife, a great son & his family that gave me a lot of wonderful memories""- L. Jay Johnson L. Jay is survived by his son; Byron (Peggy) Johnson of Centerville, Iowa, four grandchildren; Bridget Johnson of Des Moines, Iowa, Jaemi Poncy of Des Moines, Iowa, Jared Johnson of Exline, Iowa, and Paige Johnson of Des Moines, Iowa, one great grandchild; Calif Poncy and a special friend; Colleen McConville of Centerville, Iowa. L. Jay is preceded in death by his wife; Dolores, parents; Eurus and Mary Elizabeth (Pittman) Johnson, six brothers; Nova, Keith, Hugh, Earnest, J.R. and H. T. (Brownie) Johnson.

Funeral services will be held 7PM, Tuesday, March 20, 2007 at Drake Ave. Christian Church, Centerville, Iowa with Pastor Kay Singley officiating and Bob Bozwell Sr. assisting. Jack Fox will sing Peace in the Valley and How Great Thou Art. A visitation will be held Tuesday, March 20, 2007 with family present from 4-6 PM at the Thomas Lange Funeral Home, Centerville, Iowa. Casketbearers will be Al Clark, Mike Bogle, Tom Sheston, Dr. Nick Hindley, Bob Bozwell and Vern Milburn. A memorial has been established to the Centerville Fire Department for the special equipment fund and the Exline Community Betterment and may be left at or mailed to the Thomas Lange Funeral Home, 1900 S. 18th St., Centerville, IA 52544. Private burial will be held.

L Jay will be missed by his family, friends and Appanoose County.



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