



o Pastor A J Johanson, secretary of the Southern Asia Division cutting the ribbon to open Studio.

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Alf J. Johanson.

Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

Johanson, Alf Johannes (1909–1997) and Ida (Basher) (1915–2008)

CHERYL CHRISTO HOWSON

Cheryl Christo Howson earned a graduate diploma in computer aided interior designing at the Dr. Bhanuben Nanavati College of Architecture for Women in Pune, India. She co-founded an interior design company in Sri Lanka and worked as a copywriter. She contributed to the morning devotional published by Women's Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the *Shepherdess International Journal* magazine, and the *Adventist Review*. She has written several

plays. Currently (2020), she lives in Hosur, India while preparing for a piano exam.

Alf Johannes Johanson, along with his wife, Ida, served the Seventh-day Adventist church in five countries--Sweden, Burma, India, United States, and Sri Lanka--as a publishing director, church administrator, dean of men, and in the process developed countless national church leaders for varied ministries of the church.

Early Life

Alf Johannes Johanson was born December 26, 1909¹ to Eric and Augusta (Lindberg) Johanson in Jarnboas, a small town in south central Sweden. His early education was in a public school near his home. Three years after his baptism in 1925,² Alf left home to study at Ekebyholm Missionary College (Swedish Junior College)³ until 1933.⁴ In 1936 he journeyed to Newbold College, England, where he enrolled for a major in religion and minors in history and education. Here he met Ida Basher, enrolled in secretarial science, Bible instructor, and music courses.⁵ Ida was born on August 10, 1915 in the port city of Hull⁶ on the east coast of England. Her parents were Alexander Pearn and Elizabeth (Doyle) Basher.⁷

Alf and Ida left Newbold College in 1937,⁸ and were married on January 9, 1938. The couple had three children, each one born in a different country, symbolic of the global commitment of the Johansons to Adventist mission: Lawrence Gunner born in Stockholm, Sweden, on November 21, 1938; Ruth Myrtle Oliver, in Rangoon, Burma (Myanmar), on October 26, 1940: and Bruce Carl, in Bangalore (Bengaluru), India, on September 18, 1943.⁹

Career and Ministry

A.J. Johanson began his denominational service in 1933 as the Publishing Department Secretary in Sweden. He returned to the same post with his wife after graduating from Newbold College. In May 1939 the Johansons accepted a call from Southern Asia Division to serve in Burma as the Publishing Department Secretary. A year later Johanson was ordained, and in 1941 was appointed the Superintendent of the Delta Mission.¹⁰

Meanwhile, World War II was raging in Europe and Southeast Asia. With the Japanese invasion of Burma, Ida Johanson and the children were evacuated from Rangoon on February 3, 1942. The situation grew worse so that on February 16, Alf Johanson and the remaining missionaries moved out to India. With no ships available to transport the expatriates to Indian ports, the missionary caravan traveled up the Irrawaddy River and the Chindwin River by steamer, and then walked for about ten days over the Tamu Pass through the mountains, and reached to safety in India.¹¹

Once in India, Johanson continued his service in February 1942 as secretary for the Publishing and Home Missionary departments first in the Northwest India Union until March 1943, and then in the South India Union until April 1946, with additional responsibility for the Sabbath School Department.¹² During these years of

departmental leadership, Johanson was particularly noted for his intense travel in training and working with literature evangelists in the sale and promotion of health and truth-filled literature. He travelled and lived with colporteurs and national publishing leaders under the same living and travel conditions as those with whom he worked, earning for himself a close identity with field workers and church members. Ida was his solid supporter and enabler, in addition to her own professional contribution to the church in music, record preservation, and youth ministry wherever the couple worked.

In 1946 the Johansons received a much deserved furlough for rest and recuperation after the tumultuous War years when they served the church in varying fields. During this time the couple attended the 45th General Conference Session in Washington, D.C., and later took time off to study at Southern Missionary College (Southern Adventist University) where Johanson obtained his BA in Education in 1947.¹³ The family then headed back to India¹⁴ where Johanson assumed his new responsibilities as the Publishing Department secretary for the Southern Asia Division with Poona (Pune), India, as the headquarters.¹⁵

In 1954, the family took a permanent return to the U.S., where Pastor Johanson served as the Dean of Men at Walla Walla College (Walla Walla University), and Mrs. Johanson became the secretary to the college president.¹⁶ However, the permanent return turned out to be not so permanent. Ever the missionaries, the Johansons returned to Southern Asia in October 1959 to Delhi where Alf Johanson became the president of the Northwest India Union where they served until December 1962. From here he was transferred to Bangalore (Bengaluru) as the president of South India Union. After leading this largest Union mission in the Division for eight years of steady growth and stability, Johanson returned to Poona in August 1970 as the General Field secretary of the Division until February 1974¹⁷ when he was appointed as the secretary of the Division to fill the vacancy created by the sudden death of the then serving secretary, Cecil B. Guild.¹⁸ The Johansons retired at the General Conference Session in June 1975,¹⁹ and settled in Arcata, California.²⁰ After a short while Johanson returned to Southern Asia to serve as acting union president of Ceylon (Sri Lanka)²¹—the last posting of the Swede-English couple that tied the knot in their commitment to each other and to service in the hope of the second coming of their Lord.

Together the Johansons served the church for over 80 years. Alf Johanson passed away at 88 on May 24, 1997;²² and Ida on November 30, 2008, in Arcata, CA, at the age of 93.²³

Contribution and Legacy

Alf and Ida Johanson served the Adventist church long and well in three continents—Europe, Asia, and North America. Johanson's service began with literature evangelism both in his home country of Sweden and in the mission field. He promoted the sale of literature and the work of the colporteur not so much in terms in salesmanship but "soulsmanship" which he deftly defined as opening the doors to Jesus through literature. Soul-winning was his passionate motivation of service whether he served as dean of men, publishing director, field

secretary or church administrator. He lived and worked closely with national workers and believers and thus in the mission field he maintained a badge of identification with the local work force. Ida Johanson brought her own talents of music, exemplary motherhood, and administrative efficiency to bear upon her contribution to denominational service. Together for over 40 years in Burma, India, and Sri Lanka the Johansons brought a sense of diligence and devotion to Adventist ministry by their tireless commitment to Adventist ministry, community service, fund raising for hospitals and schools, and exemplary example in leading a simple and caring life.²⁴

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