



Grave of Duane Stohr Johnson.

Photo courtesy of Dot. Source: *Find a Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/10746894/duane-stohr-johnson>

## Johnson, Duane Stohr (1917–1984)

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### 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.

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Duane Stohr Johnson, a skillful church administrator, spent his professional life almost equally in educational administration and church leadership. Beginning in Burma, his service extended to Southern Asia Division, and to the world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### Early Life

Duane Stohr Johnson was born October 31, 1917 as eighth of nine children of Etta Stohr and Daniel Johnson, a family of farmers in the small town of Nevada, Iowa.<sup>1</sup> From 1921 the Johnsons were members of the Hutchinson Seventh-day Adventist congregation.<sup>2</sup> Duane studied at Maplewood Academy<sup>3</sup> in Hutchinson, Minnesota,<sup>4</sup> and was baptized in 1934.<sup>5</sup>

## Education and Marriage

After attending Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska, for two years, Duane transferred to Pacific Union College and graduated in 1940 with majors in Bible and history. Later spread over two furloughs while serving in India, he completed in 1955<sup>6</sup> a master's degree in secondary school administration at Fresno State College. During his study at PUC, Duane met Shirley Hope Cavin who graduated from PUC in 1939 with a major in biology and minors in chemistry, education, and home economics, and had completed one year in medical school and dietetics.<sup>7</sup>

Duane and Shirley were married on June 10, 1940 in Reno, Nevada, and soon began their long mission career first in the Southern Asia Division, and later to be completed at the world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The couple were blessed with three children all born in India: Danetta Shirley, George Cavin, and Stemple Duane.<sup>8</sup>

## Career and Ministry

Johnson's illustrious career as a denominational worker began in Burma, spread across several centers in the Southern Asia Division including India and Pakistan, and culminated as field secretary of the General Conference. Johnson's first appointment was in May 1941 as a missionary to Burma (Myanmar). As soon as the couple arrived in Burma, they engaged in the study of Burmese language, even as they shared the message with their neighbors and friends for eight months until January 1942<sup>9</sup> when Japan invaded Burma. World War II forced all missionaries to evacuate out of Burma. The Johnsons moved to India.<sup>10</sup>

Most of Johnson's early years in India were spent as principal and teacher in Adventist schools. His first assignment was in February 1942 to teach at Vincent Hill School at Mussoorie, a hill station in the foothills of the Garhwal Himalayan range, 180 miles north of Delhi. The family next moved to Roorkee in January 1943 where Johnson was the principal of Roorkee Secondary Boarding School until September 1946,<sup>11</sup> when he left for the U.S. on a nine-month study leave ending in July 1947. The family continued to stay in California with Johnson serving as principal of Modesto Union Academy until August 1948. During this time Johnson was ordained for the gospel ministry.<sup>12</sup>

Soon after ordination the family returned to the Southern Asia Division, with Pastor Johnson assuming the leadership of Chuharkana Elementary Boarding School, in Chuharkana,<sup>13</sup> (in Farooqabad, now in Pakistan, near

the western border of India). After the partition of British India into Pakistan and India in 1947, the Southern Asia Division was reorganized in 1949 with the formation of the Pakistan Union, of which Duane Johnson became its first president, holding that office until October 1953<sup>14</sup> when the family left for the US on furlough and study leave. In 1955 the family returned to India with the fresh appointment of Johnson as the secretary of the Southern Asia Division.

With some 15 years of field experience in Southern Asia, spread from Burma in the east to Pakistan in the west and in between the vast field of India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, Johnson was well qualified to serve as the Division secretary. His leadership as secretary from 1955 to 1962<sup>15</sup> brought to the field administrative cohesiveness, policy refinements, and organized expansion in church, evangelistic growth, and institutional development in education and healthcare.

After serving Southern Asia Division as secretary from 1955 to 1962, Johnson returned to the homeland to serve at the General Conference as an associate secretary from 1962-1980 with specific responsibilities for recruitment of overseas missionaries for the world field. At the 1980 General Conference session, Johnson was elected as a general field secretary and served until his retirement in 1981.<sup>16</sup>

## Later Life

Although retired in 1981, Johnson and his wife continued to travel overseas as volunteer mission workers.<sup>17</sup> In addition to serving Pakistan on several occasions, the Johnsons took up pastor-development work in 1982 in the West Indonesia Union Mission.<sup>18</sup> Two years later they returned to Pakistan to serve for a while as consultants in Lahore.<sup>19</sup>

In 1984, Elder Johnson was diagnosed with colon cancer. He underwent two surgeries within months of each other at Loma Linda University Medical Center where his son, Stemple, was a doctor. He was brought home to their ranch in Fresno County, California, where he passed away<sup>20</sup> on December 6, 1984 at the age of sixty-seven.<sup>21</sup>

Shirley Johnson lived for many years after that, even going overseas as a missionary with her son.<sup>22</sup> She died at her home in San Marcos, California on November 22, 2012 at the age of 93. She was buried beside her husband in Auberry Cemetery, Fresno County, California.<sup>23</sup>

## Contribution and Legacy

Besides their service in schools and administrative positions in Burma, India, Pakistan, USA<sup>24</sup> and Indonesia,<sup>25</sup> Duane Johnson was instrumental in the development of the Seventh-day Adventist volunteer overseas service program for the church, through which hundreds of college students, self-employed persons, and retirees are sent abroad each year to work in the church's mission program.<sup>26</sup>

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## NOTES

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10. "Till He Comes-Duane S. Johnson," *Southern Asia Tidings*, March 1, 1985, 14.
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17. *Ibid.*
18. "To New Posts-Duane Stohr Johnson," *ARH*, February 10, 1983, 22.
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23. "Shirley Hope Cavin Johnson."
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