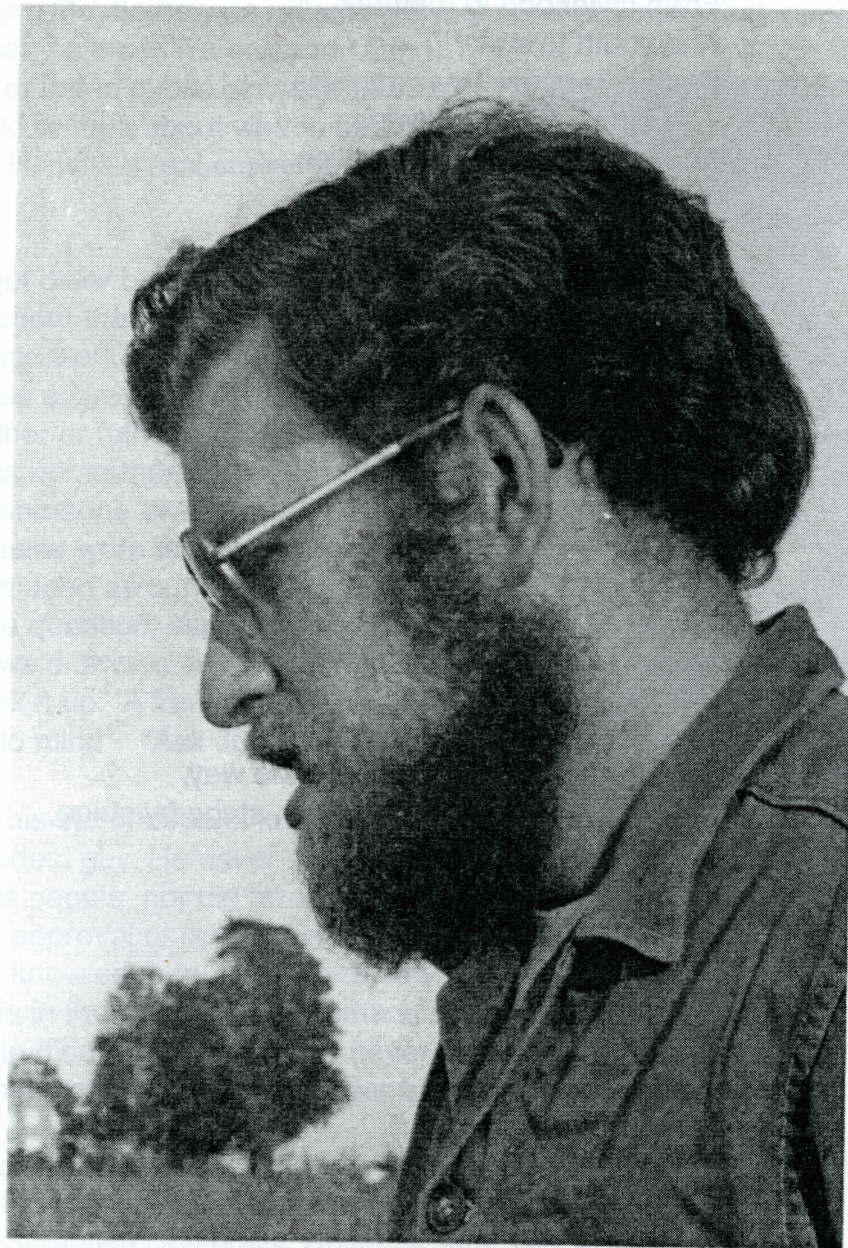


In Memoriam

# John Henry Johnston



March 13, 1947- September 5, 2003



## Our Son, John

I want to share a few of Ruth's and my memories of John. They are, of course, different from those of his friends and coworkers in his adult life and of his sister. Maybe when we get all these together we'll have a good picture of the wonderful person who was John.

He was born in the baby boom following WW II. He was a happy baby with an infectious laugh. Maybe he was reflecting the general optimism that pervaded America and the world at the time. We enjoyed taking him on a train or out in public because all kinds of people would remark about what a beautiful baby he was. He was a real conversation opener.

As he got older he became more and more curious about the world around him and about how things work. That curiosity grew and was with him his entire life. He might start off by asking his mother or father a question but when the answer was not forthcoming, as it often was not, he'd find someone else to ask. As time went on, the tables were reversed, and we came to rely on John as our living encyclopedia. When we had a question, especially about the natural world, we'd always ask him before we bothered to look it up. A frequent phrase of Ruth's comes to mind - "Ask John, he'll know."

With all his storehouse of knowledge John was a modest guy. He never seemed to want to impress people nor did he seem to need people's approval or compliments. He never used his knowledge to put anyone down or to gain points in the game of one-upmanship. Perhaps that is one reason he was so widely loved. He didn't judge people. I never heard him say anything derogatory about anyone. For that matter, I can't remember him praising anyone.

When John was deciding what to study at college he compromised between his love for nature and the practical problem of a future income. He chose to study landscape architecture at Syracuse University. However after two years he enlisted in the Army where he was eventually sent to Germany as a surveyor. Later, he taught surveying to officers and soldiers, where he showed no favoritism to rank.

After his stint in the service, he returned to Syracuse but changed his major to wild-life biology which was closer to his interests. When he graduated he bought a used Jeep,





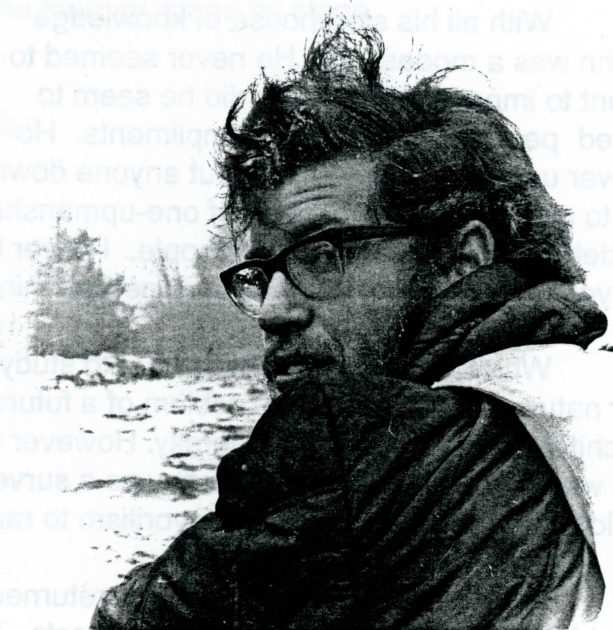
packed his gear and his camera and made an extended cross country trip camping in national and state parks. Coming home he faced, what for him, was the very distasteful task of finding a job. He had a real problem trying to sell himself. He took a temporary job at Tompkins Cortland Community College on a grant to write an operations manual.

The maintenance department became his lifetime work. He studied, took courses, attended seminars and threw himself into all aspects of maintenance at the college. To do all this he worked many more than the traditional 8 hours a day. He was on call 24/7. I remember one year we had to delay Christmas dinner on a cold and blustery day because John was on the roof restoring the failed heating system at the college. He soon became an important cog on the college staff. You might think that someone who worked as hard and as long as John did was brown nosing in order to get ahead, but somehow everyone knew that was not the case. The compensation he was looking for was his own satisfaction with a job well done.

John was very loyal to his family, to his brother and sister and mother and father and, after marriage, to his own adopted family. He thought the world of his grandchildren who called him "Poppa" and adored him.

John lived a frugal life, something along the lines of Thoreau at Walden Pond. He lived out in the country, far from a paved road and without electricity. He owned considerable acreage and was not about to have his landscape desecrated by overhead electric lines and poles. The phone line was brought in underground. I remember him fuming about a cell phone tower that went up on the far horizon. That really bothered him. He spent a couple of years designing and building a timber frame house in his woods, a house which, sadly, was never occupied because it was not suitable after he was married. John also worked with me when I designed and built our timber frame house on Mary St.

As a youngster growing up he was, of course, exposed to many of our interests and activities. One of these was kayaking. We had a two person kayak which was quite cumbersome and sometimes had a mind of its own, especially in a wind. It seemed as though whenever John was with me we ran into one problem or another. When we lived in Houston and John came for a visit, I invited him to take paddle on the bayou. It opened out into a lake where, as it turned out, they were holding a speed boat race. There





was much excitement as we barged into the middle of the race! So much for our quiet Sunday paddle on the bayou! Another time we were on a trip down the Delaware River with a group of local canoeists. It was early March and there was snow and ice on the shore. John's beard was white with frost. We were in the midst of Cooks Falls when because of my ineptitude we hit a standing wave and at least a bucket of icy water was dumped in John's lap. Fortunately, a couple of members of our group had had the good sense not to venture on the river and had parked their warmed-up van just below the rapids. They gave John a stiff shot and bundled him up in the warm van which I also found pretty comfortable.

After several more such misadventures with John in the kayak I began to realize that he had very good grounds for disliking and distrusting the boat. I realized that he did not really enjoy paddling the boat and was only coming with me out a sense of duty!

For all that, his mother and I are grateful that we did share many experiences with John which we know that he enjoyed too. Things like hiking and camping and holidays when he would come to visit and share a meal with us.

He was a wonderful son and, we believe, a beautiful person.

--Robert C. Johnston

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Strange is our situation here upon earth.  
Each of us comes for a short visit,  
not knowing why,  
yet sometimes seeming to divine a purpose.  
From the standpoint of daily life, however,  
there is one thing we do know:  
that we are here for the sake of others.  
Above all, for those upon whose smile and  
well-being our own happiness depends,  
and also for the countless unknown souls  
with whose fate we are connected by a bond of sympathy.  
Many times a day I realize how much my own outer and inner  
life is built upon the labors of my fellows both living and dead,  
and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as  
much as I have received and am still receiving.

--Albert Einstein (Adapted)

\*We are grateful to Claudia Stallman who moderated the memorial service and who read these passages from the Liberal Reform Jewish tradition.



## Our Friend and Co-worker, John

John was born on March 13, 1947 to Bob and Ruth Johnston. Before coming to Tompkins-Cortland Community College (TC3), he graduated from Binghamton Central High School, NYS College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse and served in the Army Corps of Engineers as a surveying instructor.

I first met John when he came to TC3 in 1977 as a Technical Assistant to the Administrative Dean. He was hired to write a Buildings and Grounds operations manual. When a position opened, Dean Murphy and Phil Donohue decided to hire John to supervise the Maintenance activities of the Department. There was a great deal of resentment among the department staff members when this happened. "What were they thinking, giving this important job to someone who didn't know anything about our department? What did John know about anything to do with maintenance?" As far as we were concerned, his only maintenance experience was changing tires at a previous job. He came very quietly into the department, and he did his job. On his own initiative, he took courses, attended workshops and seminars, read, and worked hands-on, gaining experience until he knew--literally--every piece of equipment in the building down to the last nut and bolt. If he had a fault, it was that he would do the work himself rather than delegate it to his subordinates. When he left, he took more knowledge of TC3 with him in his head than most of us will ever gain. I can't really tell you when the resentment gave way to acceptance --and then to total gratitude that we did INDEED have John as our Facilities Manager--but I can tell you that it happened and happened TOTALLY. John became one of the most important parts of our team.

One of the things I remember about John is that he was always adamant that he would never get married and NEVER have children, or "ankle-biters," as he called them. He was a confirmed bachelor. In fact, he often stated that he had a one-way ticket to Montana and that his bags were packed in case he did get foolish. However, once John met and fell in love with Kathy, he quickly adapted to the lifestyle and became an exemplary husband and father. He was devoted to his family and to his grandchildren. If nobody else could make John smile, his grand kids could. One day when Hunter and Dakota came to visit, John was preparing for a meeting. He was holding his grandson and Hunter didn't want to leave, so John, in his quiet fashion, promptly started off down the hall and took Hunter to the meeting with him.

John was a quiet man, a many faceted man, and a very private man. Each of us knew some part of John well. Few of us knew all of the parts of John. Maybe I can best sum him up by relating some of the comments made about John recently:

John was a one of a kind person. I'm honored to have called him a friend and co-worker. I worked with John for 24 years. His thoughtful manner, dedication, and willingness to lend a helping hand are traits that I will always respect. John was a true professional with a strong work ethic. He had a remarkable dedication to the college, which was truly his second home... John was the person that everyone went to for advice. He had an outstanding mind and could explain a problem or issue in a way that always made sense.... John is sorely missed and I can truthfully say that we will never see another man like John. There is a void at the college that can never be filled, but John will always be in our hearts and minds. We will never forget him.

--Louis Battisti, Manager Safety and Security



When John came to TC3 and started in Dean Murphy's office, I figured he was a spy just like everyone else. So I knew the best way to tell what a spy was up to was to get close to him. Well, the first thing I learned was John was no spy. He was just a regular guy, with a love for the woods, good sense of humor, and smart.

It wasn't hard to figure out why we got along so well. John loved the woods; I like the woods. John loved firearms and shooting; I love firearms and shooting. John was a fair and honest person; I love fair and honest people (there are so few around). I would say that John and I became friends almost instantly. He became, for me, my Comrade.

John was just the person to be with even the night the back up generator burned up. John saw where the smoke was coming from and ran to the mechanical room. (Well, John NEVER ran, so if he was running, it was important so I just ran along with him.) We set some switches and John calmly observed the situation and commented how much equipment we just saved. Me, I just looked at the smoke above us, and asked if we could leave now. What a guy--fearless under fire... My memories of John will be with me always in my thoughts, my actions, and my heart.

—John Petrella

(More comments from co workers, next pages)

His father referred to him as their "living encyclopedia." His interests were wide -- from building construction, communication systems, to the natural world and astronomy. He knew something about everything, but he didn't flaunt that knowledge. You only realized the depth of it when you got to know John. He had an extremely unassuming presence. As a child and as an adult, he could spend time staring out a window, or seemingly lost in space, but when you spoke with him, you knew that his mind was constantly in motion, absorbing all that he saw and heard.

JOHN WAS A GENTLEMAN. This is a term you don't think of often anymore in relation to someone you know, but John certainly was one. Not only was he a gentleman, but he was a gentle man. He was caring and sympathetic to all. I can't tell you how many times he would see me visibly upset and just quietly put his hand on my shoulder, saying nothing, but calming me down and giving me time for thought.

He was honest. If it meant telling you a lie, he would tell you nothing. If he gave you an answer, you knew that you could count on it. John was always thorough in his work, in his life and in his speech. It might take 40 minutes to tell you something, but you got a complete answer and a thorough answer.

He had a sense of humor. If you knew him, you could usually tell whether he was joking or serious, but if you didn't know him, oh well !! John Petrella tells me the story of walking through John's beloved woods with him and coming upon a tree. He asked John what they were looking at. John walked over to the tree, examined a leaf. ran his hand up and down the bark, gave his familiar little smirk, and replied, "It's a tree." Later, he explained what kind of tree it was and the facts that applied to it.

I can remember in our younger days, we would all stop at JP's after work for cheese and crackers and a beverage. John would always sit between the female grounds supervisor and me and tell the bartender that we were his ex-wives whom he needed to keep



happy. For months, the guy really believed him.

John had a love affair with nature and with life. He bloomed in his beloved woods, and even though he cherished his privacy, he welcomed the chance to introduce others to his dreams and his loves. I remember one day when I was home on a maternity leave. He drove to my house, piled the baby and me into his pickup truck, and took us to Montezuma, where we spent the afternoon wandering around the wildlife refuge that he so enjoyed. It was spontaneous and fun and just John.

More comments from co-workers:

John loved the snow...he disliked hot sticky weather. I never saw John in shorts, never saw him run, he said he did "chasing dogs" but never saw him though. Never saw John drive over 45. He drank tea and an occasional beer.

JJ was one to pay attention to detail, except when driving in snow. John loved the outdoors and his dogs and other creatures. However, during one conversation he said he had disdain for squirrels and chipmunks--said they were in his house.

JJ liked Burger King, I thought he had stock in the company, he said he didn't. Before that he dined at the Brooklyn Diner.

JJ wasn't a sports enthusiast--he called it organized grab a\_\_\_. I like sports and never thought of it in those terms. John persuaded me to get a pistol permit and showed me how to use the guns I purchased. Again, safety and precision were foremost.

Never saw JJ without a beard.

John usually kept his thoughts to himself, a fine quality for an individual to live life by.

Never saw John wear sneakers.

Heard JJ say "ya right fella" knowing he didn't totally agree with what was being said. Called me an idiot a few times and then we would both laugh. I knew he was right.

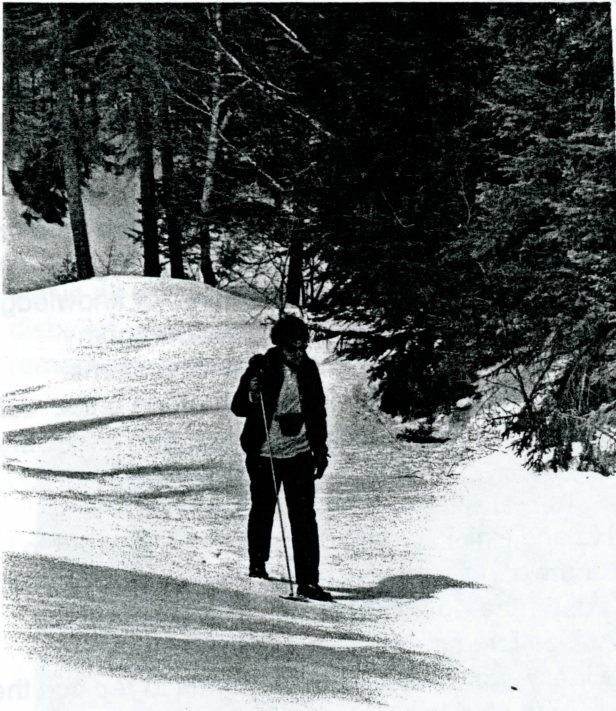
All and all, JJ lived a simple, yet intelligent life and will be missed by those who knew him for his ways and will be thought of when I walk my dog up the tracks of life.

—Kevin Fairand

He designed and built a home in the woods that he so cherished, designing and cutting each timber individually so the joints would interlock and no nails would be used in the frame. It took him several years, but he persisted until it was done. Unfortunately, living in the house was one of the dreams he wasn't able to accomplish.

He was an avid and accomplished photographer. He had an eye for composition. After graduation, he took a trip out west and photographed the scenery, mostly in color. After that, a camera was John's constant companion. He especially loved to take pictures of his family, of nature scenes, and of old barns. He had a special spot in his heart for old barns. If you're fortunate, you might have one of John's framed prints hanging on your wall. I have two, and I cherish them. John was also a great cook. At parties or dish-to-pass dinners, he would bring baked beans or an apple pie that would make your mouth water.





He was often a behind-the-scenes worker. For the first two phases of our most recent capital project, you might not have seen him working, but he single-handedly did all the phone and computer wiring and many other things to make the moves happen, often at night and on the weekends. And he never told you that he was here 24/7, you just knew it. He didn't care whether he got credit or not.

John very seldom showed anger. He resisted the temptation to fly off the handle, unlike myself. He was my calming influence. When I would be spouting off about something which had gone wrong or some job which I felt was totally ridiculous, he would listen to me vent, give me his grin, talk me through the issue, and calm me down (usually).

John was devoted to his family -not only to his wife, children, and grandchildren, but to his parents, siblings, and relatives. I can remember the days when John's brother was ill and the countless hours John spent worrying about him and his family, and doing all that he was able to help out. And the many times that he expressed concern, as well as pride, for his parents and their active lifestyles at their ages.

John showed his great courage often during the last year. He participated in all the decision making and always wanted to go on, thinking that whatever was done to him would help. When his family addressed Christmas cards to some of his friends, John actually signed many of them, even though it was thought to be impossible, due to the neurological damage to his body. His cousin states "Time and again, his hard work gave the rest of us the courage to encourage him."

John was the person everyone wanted to know. Think about that: literally everyone who ever met John cared about him, wanted to talk with him, spend time with him. What a great thing to be able to say. He was my counterpart, my friend, my confidante. I could tell him anything and know that that was as far as it would go. I knew he would understand and that he was always there for me. One of the verses I read while trying to think of what I could say to you today was "To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die." I believe that John will always live on in our hearts. If I can ask one thing of you today, it is to think about the parts of John that you knew well. Pick out the thing that you admired most about John and take that with you. Make it a part of your life. Let him live on in your hearts.

--Anita Sharpsteen, Co-Worker,  
Tompkins Cortland Community College



## John, Employee

Two years ago on this date (September 11th) John walked into a College Services Council meeting late, as he was attending to some problem. It was John who first informed us of the first plane to hit the World Trade Center. That moment will be with me forever. Who would have thought that in two years we would be gathering here in remembrance of John?

John came to the college as a recent graduate with a degree in forestry and desire to learn, and learn he did. Over the years John became our expert on many systems and technologies that hadn't existed at the time of his graduation from ESF. Not only did John have a thirst for knowledge, he wanted to pass this knowledge on to others. At the time that B&G area became part of my responsibility John started the task of educating me about the building and its many systems. Orientation began with a tour of the roof and the inner workings of the infamous roof top units. John was a good teacher and felt strongly that I should become familiar with those things that were very important to him.

John also knew how to drive home a point. He and Phil kept telling me that we needed to plan to replace the HVAC system, that it was aging and wearing out. Then one day a shaft on one of the fans seized up and had to be replaced. John cut off the broken part and delivered it to my office. I kept that rusty 5 pound piece of metal in my office for years and used it to show Board members and legislators what we were up against. Finally, we were able to get funds to replace the HVAC system. After three years of work the system is expected to be complete this fall. I only wish that John could be here to see the results of his advocacy — and to help us make the new system work!

John also knew the history and culture of the college. One day John came to me and said that the big elm tree in front of the college had suffered from Dutch Elm disease and the tree would have to come down. John was clearly troubled about this. First, that he was unable to save the tree. Second, that the tree meant a lot to the founders of the college. Apparently Hu Bahar and Ron Space used the tree as a reference point in laying out the campus. Both Hu and John having backgrounds in forestry wanted to preserve this very old and interesting tree. John feared that cutting the tree down would be disturbing to the many faculty and staff involved in starting the college. After much discussion with John it was agreed that we needed to take the tree down, but John felt that we should preserve the wood. He had planks made and saved them. We are now having a conference table made out of that wood for use in the President's Office. As we use this table it will be a constant reminder of John's desire to preserve the culture and memories of the college.

John was devoted to TC3 and the people who worked and studied here. He always approached his responsibilities and people in a very professional manner, listening patiently to an individual's problems and working quietly but effectively to solve problems. There was rarely a time when you did not find John at TC3. He was here early in the morning and often worked well into the evening. On those occasions when I would come in on a Saturday, Sunday or holiday the first thing that I would see was John's truck parked out back. I had more than one conversation with John about working too hard and would press him to take some vacation; he usually responded that he would as soon as he felt comfortable about the current project. Yet he rarely took time off and continued to do what he felt he needed to do. John truly felt passionate about the work that he did and took seriously his responsibilities. He lived life according to a very high set of principles and values that included both work and family.

We truly missed John during his long illness and mourn his passing.

—Dr. Robert Ross, Dean of Administration, TC3



More comments from coworkers:

On one occasion, I mentioned to John that I didn't understand why some things at the college weren't handled differently...He very quietly, and with minimal words, said that perhaps the person couldn't make the changes I had hoped for—that it was out of his hands. A very quiet comment, but a very accurate one. It was a comment that left you thinking about the depth of what he said. I think we've all been walking around in shock since first hearing of his illness, probably more so in great disbelief, as I can't recall him every being out sick. John had a positive impact on people; I never remember even an unkind word.

—Gerri Relyea



I always admired his infectious smile. No matter where I saw him he had a perpetual grin on his face, and he always made a point to say hello. He reminded me of a gentle and caring mountain man who appreciated nature to its fullest. Perhaps it was the flannel shirt and beard, but, in reality, I think it was his mannerisms.

—Bev Carey

John was a good listener. John was my sounding board for questions. He helped me many times with questions I had about work and home. When I was at my wits end he would listen and try to help. Now don't get me wrong, listening was not his greatest asset. Everyone knew John could talk. As a matter of fact, you better block off some time on your calendar if you were going to ask John a question. John was also willing to show you how things were done. He would have you go through a process to help you remember. I am a hands on type learner and this was invaluable to me.

—Mike

"He was a Renaissance Man -a universal, well -rounded man."

"He was the only person I ever knew who could look impeccably groomed in blue jeans and a flannel shirt, his traditional uniform."

"In his bachelor days, he was always quick to point out that his mom personally made his shirts for him. If he had a meeting (and boy, was he razzed on those days), he could do a superman act — ducking into a phone booth office and emerging not only as impeccable, but as "WOW."

"John knew something (a lot) about everything. I can remember many times working on crossword puzzles with John looking over my shoulder to give me an answer when I was stuck."

—various co-workers



## John's Last Year

Like the song, "John the Generator" by John Herald, John was indeed a Generator. He generated a lot of love and loyalty in his lifetime. He generated great friends.

Talking about John's illness is both the hardest and, for me, the easiest task because this is where I got to know him. In spite of his being so very ill from the last week in May 2002 until he died on Sept. 5, 2003, I got to know him like never before. I hope we made his life easier for being there for him, being an advocate and "his voice" when he couldn't speak. With one week exception, I drove from Woodstock to spend every Wednesday and Thursday with him for 14 months. I'm saddened beyond belief that he is gone and, as a friend said, I'm now out of a "job", but it was a job I eagerly looked forward to every week.

I knew little of John's personality when this disease hit, but I knew this was the time to step up and become part of his care team, partly motivated by being unable or unavailable when his brother Bill and my own brother Carl were terminally ill. I went to his wedding, had a couple visits to his place and mine, some holidays with him, his parents' 50th anniversary, and Ruth's fabulous 90th birthday. I knew he was a quiet, level-headed, observant, logical, practical man who loved taking photos, being with his dogs, and was a good woodsman.

The program says "John's last year" but in truth, his illness lasted 15 1/2 months. At first he had vertigo and was vomiting and could not stand up. Perhaps an inner ear infection. When that went on for a week, he was brought to the hospital, and it was diagnosed as a stroke. It was neither and we guessed that was so since he didn't lose speech immediately but over a month. Right from the get-go, we knew his mind was intact. It was a real gift to us that John's mind was clear. He always gave the answer he intended to communicate, throughout the entire time. An example was once when a doctor was asking him questions to determine if he understood what was going on. The doctor asked, "Is there just one doctor in the room?" John shook his head "no." The doctor thinking John was not understanding, said, "Are you sure?" John nodded "yes", he was sure, and then held up 2 fingers. Remembering that his father has a PhD, he knew there were TWO doctors in the room!

None of the doctors had a clue about the origin or treatment of John's illness; the debilitation even made one doctor wonder if John were literate! I had a hunch that it could be an autoimmune disease, and believe it or not, in early August I found on the internet a rare disease with a cluster of symptoms that fit John's situation. It turned out that the doctors were considering the same thing at the same time. By then, John had had surgery for a cancer on his salivary gland, and eventually found that John had a very rare cancer-caused autoimmune disease called PCD, paraneoplastic cerebellar degeneration.

It was a year of contrasts, of loss and gain and then more loss, false starts and diagnoses, filled with daily struggle and pain, and even some joys and days of dancing around with victory.

It was a year of no one knowing, of learning to "read" what was happening ourselves, and then teaching others, of observation and adjustments. It was a year of despair and encouragement, a year of real support from family and friends near and far. It was a year of observing John's mind-boggling courage and even more frustration.

Cosmic questions abound that will never be answered. Where does this disease come from? Why does it hit a particular person, previously healthy? Could it have been prevented? lessened in impact? Because it's a rare disease, will they ever find a cure? We'd tried several times to find a researcher working on this, but time ran out.



I know John wrestled with these thoughts, even as PCD robbed him of most communication with the outside world. Sitting with him, we'd wonder out loud, so John knew we were struggling for answers, too. I once said to him, "John, when this is over and you get your speech back, I'll bet you have a book written in your head about this ordeal." He vigorously nodded YES!

Then there was the incredible loneliness of being virtually locked inside an uncooperative body and being unable to communicate more than a yes/no answer—and that's if we could find the right questions to ask. Peg often said she was getting better at 20 Questions. How hard he tried...tried writing when his uncoordinated hand could create only a scribble. We tried an alphabet board, getting one letter at a time, which was agonizingly slow. Yet he persevered—his first communication to us was to find a screwdriver for the tiny loose screw in his glasses!

By Christmas, he surprised and delighted us by signing his name — roughly but certainly recognizable -- on a dozen cards to family and friends. He found ways to communicate— a pat on the back for thanks brought me back week after week. A touch to his wrist, we discovered, meant tell me what time it is. John asked us in January by slowly spelling out on a touch computer, to remind Kathy to pay the land taxes!

Another problem John and his family faced was surviving the loss of one's personal privacy, personal space. How do you do that? You expect to surrender that to nurses, doctors and aides, but to your family? But he did, with grace, knowing it was necessary. How do you live in this situation and keep your dignity—or more accurately, live with losing it? I don't pretend to know how John coped with this, but out of necessity he did.

All I know is how much we worked at respecting his dignity, and tried at every turn to include him in any decision-making about his treatment. We always respectfully asked him if HE wanted us to clean out his mouth, trim his fingernails, beard and hair, get more pain medicine, or read to him. We asked him, instead of assuming anything.

A compassionate bond developed between John and his dad. Bob took on the lion's share of the time tending to John's needs for company and for an advocate, going to the hospital 4-5 times a week, or more. All of us would read aloud to John, books we thought he'd like, giving him several choices.

This year taught me so much more about John than I had previously known, even without his ability to speak. I learned what real courage is. I learned what real perseverance is. I learned what real resolve is, to go on in the face of endless pain, discomfort, and nausea, in order to be well again. He even survived a bout of having hand restraints at one point, when his feeding tube kept coming out. This was the low point for me, and I guess for John, too.

We celebrated his victories — even the littlest gain. We were his cheer leading and encouragement crew. John knew deep down that he was loved and cared for. We empathized with his pain and with his frustration.

We tried in many ways to bring the outside world to his bedside. Friends sent cards, letters, and photos which he very much appreciated, especially the hand-cut designs that Ginny Nicholson made for him, week after week. John loved getting phone calls. He could say "HI", and nodded yes to what his friends said —which we'd have to translate into a verbal Yes or No, as needed. Though he couldn't thank you, we do.



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Another problem John and his family faced was surviving the loss of one's personal privacy, personal space. How do you do that? You expect to surrender that to nurses, doctors and aides, but to your family? But he did, with grace, knowing it was necessary. How do you live in this situation and keep your dignity—or more accurately, live with losing it? I don't pretend to know how John coped with this, but out of necessity he did.

All I know is how much we worked at respecting his dignity, and tried at every turn to include him in any decision-making about his treatment. We always respectfully asked him if HE wanted us to clean out his mouth, trim his fingernails, beard and hair, get more pain medicine, or read to him. We asked him, instead of assuming anything.

A compassionate bond developed between John and his dad. Bob took on the lion's share of the time tending to John's needs for company and for an advocate, going to the hospital 4-5 times a week, or more. All of us would read aloud to John, books we thought he'd like, giving him several choices.

This year taught me so much more about John than I had previously known, even without his ability to speak. I learned what real courage is. I learned what real perseverance is. I learned what real resolve is, to go on in the face of endless pain, discomfort, and nausea, in order to be well again. He even survived a bout of having hand restraints at one point, when his feeding tube kept coming out. This was the low point for me, and I guess for John, too.

We celebrated his victories – even the littlest gain. We were his cheer leading and encouragement crew. John knew deep down that he was loved and cared for. We empathized with his pain and with his frustration.

We tried in many ways to bring the outside world to his bedside. Friends sent cards, letters, and photos which he very much appreciated, especially the hand-cut designs that Ginny Nicholson made for him, week after week. John loved getting phone calls. He could say "HI", and nodded yes to what his friends said –which we'd have to translate into a verbal Yes or No, as needed. Though he couldn't thank you, we do.



His sister Peg not only was his healthcare proxy, a difficult job, but she taught John to shoot baskets with a rubber ball into a makeshift hoop at the foot of his bed. She brought games, and we all took turns at exercising his muscles. Peg brought him a VCR and a computer, trying for better communication. Others brought videos which he enjoyed watching, but only with someone there.

Most of all, he loved being read to. Favorites were his grandfather Herman Johnston's memoirs, two books about observing the behavior of ravens by Bernd Heinrich, books about sheep dogs, and veterinarians, shaggy-dog jokes and Arizona Highways articles.

Another important word of thanks goes to the nurses and especially the aides at Wilson Memorial, where John lived for just under a year. They were kind, caring, gentle, encouraging, and they loved John. They became a substitute family for him and for us.

By John showing so much courage, we reflected that back to him, and thus we gained in courage and optimism that he might one day live at home. That was not to be, but he, and we, held it out as a goal.

It was the hardest year in John's life. The hardest year I've ever seen in anyone's life. I don't say this lightly, but I am honored to have been part of it and I thank John for allowing me into his life. I miss him deep in my soul. Our friend Allan Troxler said it best: he hoped John would soon get back to living amidst the woods which was his true home.

—By Jane VanDeBogart  
September 21, 2003

### **Life After Death**

These things I know:  
How the living go on living  
and how the dead go on living with them  
so that in a forest  
even a dead tree casts a shadow  
and the leaves fall one by one  
and the branches break in the wind  
and the bark peels off slowly  
and the trunk cracks  
and the rain seeps in through the cracks  
and the trunk falls to the ground  
and the moss covers it  
and in the spring the rabbits find it  
and build their nest  
inside the dead tree  
so that nothing is wasted in nature  
or in love.