



Dr. Karl Mckibben Johnson

May 14, 1929 - October 10, 2023

Dr. Karl Mckibben Johnson, 94, of Tallahassee, Florida, died on October 10, 2023 in Tallahassee, of injuries sustained in a fall.

The eldest of three children, he was born on May 14, 1929 to Marion Johnson and Laura Mckibben in Terre Haute, Indiana.

A beloved husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather, Karl was married three times, to Donna MacPherson, with whom he had three children, Kurt, David, and Melissa, to Patricia Ann Webb, and to Merle Ann Kuehne.

Karl attended Oberlin College where he was a pre-med major, after which he studied medicine at the University of Rochester. Following his medical residency, he worked at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NAIAD) on respiratory cold viruses. In 1962 Karl moved to, and later directed, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) field laboratory at the Middle American Research Unit in the Panama Canal Zone. There he studied important infectious diseases of Latin America. It was from there that he led the American/Bolivian team that isolated, named, and controlled a deadly epidemic of Machupo virus (Bolivian Hemorrhagic Fever). When the NIH shut down the facility in Panama, Karl moved to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and while there led the team that isolated the Ebola virus, which he named, in Zaire in 1976. He served as the Chief of the Special Pathogens

Branch of the Virology Division and played a major role in the discovery of Hantaan virus in Korea. A Past President of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, Karl's contributions to the fields of virology and tropical medicine were numerous and significant. His many publications in the field's leading journals did much to advance the fields he worked in. He garnered many awards in the course of his career, not least among these are the Order of the Condor of the Andes from the Bolivian government for his work on Machupo (1964), the Gorgas Medal (shared with his wife Patricia Webb) in 1969, and the Walter Reed Medal, which recognizes distinguished accomplishments in the field of tropical medicine, in 2005. In 1998 he was recognized as a Kilby Laureate, receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Having played baseball and basketball in high school and college, Karl was an avid sports fan, but perhaps his greatest passion, apart from science, was for the art of fly fishing. He combined these two passions as a founding member of the Governor's Task Force on Whirling Disease, an effort begun in Montana to address a virus that devastated Rainbow trout populations in several western states.

Karl is survived by his wife Merle Anne Johnson, his son David F. Johnson, wife Corine Samwel, and their three children Ian (Agnes) great-grandson Maxwell, Nathan (Vanessa), great-grandson Vincent, and Laura (Cole); daughter-in-law Laurie St. Laurent and her children Katie (Nicholas) great-grandson Keegan and great-granddaughter Ellen, and Kraig (Megan); son-in-law John Cushman (Mary-Sue) and grandson Evan, as well as his wife Merle's children: daughter Diane and husband Tom, and their daughter Alanna, son Douglas, and his daughter Jennifer.

He was preceded in death by his daughter Melissa, son Kurt, brother Bruce, and sister Ellen.

A memorial will be held in Karl's honor on December 15, 2023, from 2:00-6:00 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Tallahassee, Florida.

In lieu of flowers, please consider the following:

Donations may be made in memory of 1984 President Karl M. Johnson, MD, FASTMH to the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene at <https://www.astmh.org/special-pages/donation-form>.

To make donations to another organization very close to Karl's heart, Trout Unlimited, please call 1.800.834.2419 or send a check to the address below.

Trout Unlimited

The Karl M Johnson Fund

Attn Jeffrey Anderson

1777 N Kent St, Suite 100

Arlington, VA 22209

A donation to the Big Bend Hospice House may be made by following this link: <https://bigbendhospice.charityproud.org/Donate>

Breanna Green of Bevis Funeral Home (850-385-2193 or www.bevisfh.com) is assisting the family with their arrangements.

Previous Events

Memorial

DEC **15**. 2:00 PM - 6:00 PM (ET)

Unitarian Universalist Church
2810 N. Meridian Road
Tallahassee, FL 32303

Tribute Wall

VH

“ We have just searched and learned that Karl passed away. My husband and I were neighbors of the Johnsons when they were in Atlanta. So many wonderful memories of Karl and Merle. We lost touch with them years after they moved to Montana. Would love to reconnect with Merle.
Our deepest sympathies to all the family for your loss.

Vivian and Bobby Harrell - March 26, 2024 at 04:18 PM

MB

“ Karl was a good friend, colleague and mentor to several of us at NIAID's Rocky Mountain Labs in Hamilton, Montana. He organized and headed the peer review panel that oversaw the design and construction of our Biosafety Level 4 facility, and was instrumental in insuring the success of that program. In addition, his insights and advice were critical in the professional development of the RML staff and the subsequent creation of the Laboratory of Virology. His intellect, advice, strict attention to detail, and wit are a paradigm. We will miss him immensely. Marshall Bloom, Heinz Feldmann and Ricki Feldmann.

Marshall Bloom - December 14, 2023 at 11:38 AM