

News from Nan

DICK'S FAMILY HISTORY

MY FATHER, HAROLD RICHARD JOHNSON

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Harold Richard Johnson working as a machinist

June 21st is my father's birthday. Happy birthday Dad!

My father, Harold Richard Johnson, born in 1919, was the second child of Alfred Peter Charles Johnson and Eva Irene Robins. His older brother was Kenneth Alfred (Kenny) Johnson, born 1916, and his younger sister was Evelyn Irene Johnson, born 1922. Both Kenny and Harold were born in the Buffalo area (Tonawanda and North Tonawanda, respectively), but Evelyn was born near Elgin, Ontario, where Alfred and Eva lived for a while in the early 1920s farming. The Alfred Johnson family was back in the Buffalo area by 1923.

Harold married Lillian Moseley (in 1939) during the Great Depression. Times were tough then. When they were first married, they lived in a room with Alfred and Eva Johnson on Kiel Street in North Tonawanda. At that time Dad was working as a lathe hand with his father Alfred at Spaulding Fibre, one of the biggest employers in the area.

Dad graduated from North Tonawanda High School in 1936. He did well in school, and would have been college material, but because of the economic depression, going to college was not an option.

Instead, during the time he worked at Spaulding Fibre, he worked his way up to become a master tool and die maker. He used to brag that he “could operate any machine on the floor!”

In 1951, he and my mother decided to move to California, where he worked for a contract tool and die shop in El Cajon where my Uncle Kenny also worked. (Kenny and Grace had moved to Southern California in the early 40s). In 1951, when we first got to California, we even lived with my uncle for a while in El Cajon.

Later he worked at Ryan Aeronautical. He started as a tool and die maker, and then became a shop foreman and eventually building superintendent. At one time he had several hundred people reporting to him. Unfortunately, Ryan went through one of those typical slumps that aerospace companies experience so often, and my father ended up having to supervise the layoff of many people in his area. Having to do that hit him very hard. He was still at Ryan until just before I graduated from high school in 1960. After Ryan, he worked at Rohr Aircraft.

Dad used to read a lot when I was a kid, mostly historical novels by authors like Frank Yerby. I can remember listening to the radio with my father and mother in their bedroom. Once television came along in the early 50s, he pretty much gave up reading for TV. He used to watch sports, such as wrestling and football. He collected newspaper sports clippings when he was a kid, mostly about boxing and wrestling. I remember looking through a his scrapbook full of old newspaper clippings about boxers Primo Carnera and Joe Louis.

He was a Mason when he lived in New York. He rose to be Grand Master of the Masonic lodge in Tonawanda.

Dad became chief of the Brighton Volunteer Fire Company in Tonawanda shortly before we moved to California.

◀ 2018 ◀ BIRTHDAY ◀ JOHNSON ◀ NEW YORK ◀ NORTH TONAWANDA