

Dale Gedge Johnson, M.D.

September 27, 1930 ~ March 31, 2024

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Dale Gedge Johnson, M.D. passed away on March 31st, 2024 surrounded by his family. After 93 years of relentless activity – intellectual and physical – Dale's body finally wore out. He was disappointed his life had to end so soon. There was still much to learn, lessons to teach, and adventures to plan. Dale was a guiding star to many, a position he earned through hard work, dedication, service, and honor and respect for every individual – and every patient – he connected with. His skills and extraordinary care touched untold numbers of children and their families. We will never forget our father's gentle strength and goodness, his unassailable character, and all his accomplishments.

Dale, the eldest son of Morris and Leah Johnson, was born and raised in Salt Lake City, Utah. At age six he played the violin and, although he relinquished that pursuit for others, Dale's perfect pitch and passion for classical, choral, and operatic music were mainstays throughout his life.

Dale's experiences while serving an LDS mission to South Africa enlarged his world; it may have been there that he fully internalized the values of service and compassion that he practiced for 70+ more years, and his missionary companions were among his closest, lifelong friends. Upon returning to Utah to complete undergraduate studies at the University of Utah, he met his lasting love, Beverly Clark. They were married shortly after in the Salt Lake Temple. Music was their glue; decades later they enjoyed singing together in the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

Dale completed medical school at the U, relocated to Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston with his young family for surgical residency and, following military service research, accepted a position at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. In the first in a long series of academic appointments, Dale also served as Professor of Surgery and Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania. While there, C. Everett Koop, former U.S. Surgeon General, and Dale were responsible for establishing pediatric surgery as a new area of surgical specialization that would transform medical treatment for newborns and young children.

A turn of events led Dale to move his family back to Salt Lake City. He served as Surgeon-in-Chief at Primary Children's Medical Center and Chief of the Division of Pediatric Surgery from 1971-2001, alongside appointments as Professor of Surgery and Professor of Pediatrics with the University of Utah School of Medicine. We saw too little of him as he began his practice alone, building Primary's Department of Pediatric Surgery to create the nationally recognized entity it is today. He treated infants and children from five continents, educated, trained, and mentored countless young surgeons, and shared his expertise abroad. In a show of appreciation to Dale's years of medical service to the children and surgeons of Poland, he was invited to sing with the Polish National Choir (and memorized the songs in Polish), including a trip to the Vatican to perform for Pope John Paul II, the first Polish

Pope. We’re not sure how our dad juggled all of his endeavors, but his optimistic disposition prevailed under often grueling circumstances, and his ability to run on fumes helped. At the most basic level, medicine was a calling for Dale; his colleagues recall him operating in a ski boot for a time so that a foot injury didn’t preclude his being there for patients.

In recognition of his innovations and years of service in medicine, Dale was honored with numerous awards for distinguished service, teaching, and mentoring. His commitment to the medical profession included leadership positions in more than 25 national and international medical organizations, including Past President of the American Pediatric Surgical Association; Past President of the Pacific Association of Pediatric Surgeons; the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Surgical Association; and the Lilliputian Surgical Society.

In addition to carving turns in knee-deep powder at Utah’s ski resorts or helicopter skiing in Canada, Dale relished biking, rollerblading, and beekeeping; he read prodigiously, built part of his own tennis court, maintained a garden, and adored computers. He enjoyed giving generously to people in need, as well as to his own family members.

Dale is survived by his wife of 72 years, Beverly Clark Johnson; his brother Gordon (VeeDrienne) Johnson; his children, Pam (Robert) Fillmore, Paul (Martha) Johnson, Charlotte (Shawn) Ferrin, and Peter (Mel) Johnson; 13 grandchildren; 42 great-grandchildren; and three great-great grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his parents Morris and Leah Johnson, and siblings Gaylen (Alaire) Johnson and Elaine (Hal) Sharp.

Funeral services will be held Thursday, April 11th, at 12 noon, at the LDS Hilltop Ward Chapel, 589 East 18th Avenue, Salt Lake City, Utah. Friends may call at the Ward prior to services from 10:30-11:30 am. Interment will be at the Salt Lake Cemetery. We are grateful to family members, friends, and healthcare providers who supported and loved him to the end. In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations in memory of Dale to Primary Children’s Medical Center or Project HOPE.

Friends and family are welcome to join the services virtually by clicking on the "Watch Services" link above.