

# *Lasting Memories*

*An online directory of obituaries and remembrances of Midpeninsula residents*



## **Kenneth Wolcott Johnson**

*Nov. 6, 1921-April 13, 2014*

*Palo Alto, California*

Kenneth Wolcott Johnson passed away on Sunday, April 13, 2014, at home in Palo Alto.

A lifelong resident of Palo Alto, Kenneth (or simply Ken) was the first of two children of Betty and Wolcott Johnson. He is survived by his younger sister Dianne, his children Carol, Margie, Larry and Doug, as well as 11 grandchildren and 9 great-grandchildren.

Growing up in Palo Alto, Ken was active in the youth groups of Palo Alto First Congregational Church, where he became acquainted with a fellow Paly student, Evelyn Pleasant. Even though he went off to Caltech for his undergraduate training, their romance survived the separation, and they became committed to each other while he was working on a Navy research project at Caltech and she was performing defense work at Alcoa in Los Angeles. Ken eventually transferred to active duty in the Navy. He was assigned to a ship in the European Theater in 1945, and so they decided to get married on January 17, 1945. The obstacles and adventures along Ken's cross-country journey to return to California for the wedding became known as the "two-dollar bill" story, a tale beloved by family and friends alike.

After the war ended, Ken and Evie returned to Palo Alto, where he completed a master's degree in electrical engineering at Stanford. In 1947, he began working as an engineer for his father's company, Johnson-Williams, arguably the earliest electronics business in Palo Alto, in 1947.

A unifying custom, maintained for many years, was a family vacation in Tahoma, California, on the western shore of Lake Tahoe. Ken was enthusiastic about hiking, swimming and fishing, and often led trips of grandchildren up the Cascade Falls trail. In later years, Ken and Evie took numerous overseas trips, business and personal, to Europe, Japan, China, Australia, Latin America and New Zealand, and delighted in the close friendship of his business partners. They remained lifelong friends with families from Nigeria, Japan and Belgium.

After the sale of Johnson-Williams, Ken started his own company, GasTech, in 1971. He served as head of GasTech until 1992, when he retired and started up KWJ Engineering, where he worked until January of this year.

In addition to numerous trips throughout their golden years, Ken and Evie stayed sharp by regularly and soundly defeating grandchildren at Scrabble. Their victories were always gracious and were followed by a generous helping of Marianne's ice cream, thus satisfying all parties.

Ken will be missed by those who survive him, but solace is found in his reunion with Evie, who passed away in 2012 after 67 years of marriage.

Tags: veteran

## Photo Gallery

[0 photos](#) [Upload a photo](#)

## Remembrances

[3 entries](#) [Submit a remembrance](#)

### From Cindy Goral

May 8, 2014

*I was so sorry to hear about Mr. Johnson's passing. He was always an energetic guy, passing our house on his daily walks around the neighborhood. It is sad that we have lost one more wonderful person on Laguna Way. May he rest in peace along with ou...*

[Read more](#)

## Video

[Upload a video](#)

## Memorial service

A memorial service will be held on May 9 at 1 p.m. at First Congregational Church of Palo Alto: 1985 Louis Road, Palo Alto. All are welcome.

## Make a donation

Ken's generosity was felt by all who had the good fortune to be a part of his life. If contributions in his name are desired, the family suggests they may be made to CARE or to Doctors Without Borders.

[About this site](#) [Contact us](#)