

**MEMORIAL**  
**J. G. "Gus" Johnson**

**Iowa Judges Association – November 16, 2007**

"He was admired, respected, and loved by his family, friends and peers for his accepting and inclusive nature, his reverence for justice and dedication to the law, his enthusiasm for thinking big thoughts while deriving joy from life's smallest moments, and his enthusiastic support and love for his lifelong sweetheart and family."

These words were written in tribute to J. G. "Gus" Johnson who died April 3, 2007, at the age of 72.

He was born July 6, 1934, in Des Moines, Iowa, the son of John and Mildred Johnson, and while named "John Gustav" he became better known as "Gus." He graduated from Des Moines Roosevelt High School in 1952. He was president of the student body. He was captain of the swimming team and was both a state champion and All-American. He continued athletic excellence as a three-year letter winner on the Harvard collegiate swimming team. He obtained his bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1956.

He attended Drake University Law School and graduated with honors in 1959. He was editor of the Drake Law Review and recognized as the Outstanding Drake Law Graduate of the Class of 1959 by the Iowa Bar Association.

After law school, he considered joining one of the prominent firms in Des Moines and may have, absent a talk with friend and classmate Walt Saur. The two checked with the Iowa Bar Association and found that Oelwein, Iowa, had the fewest attorneys per capita in the state. They visited Oelwein, found it to be a wonderful place to start a practice and to raise a family, and never left. In June 1959, the Saur & Johnson Law Firm opened for business. Chagrined by a lack of attendance at their open house, they decided to seek election as county attorney. Walt running as a Republican and Gus running as a Democrat. Walt was victorious and immediately hired Gus as his assistant, an arrangement that continued for many years until Walt's son, Wayne, joined the practice

in 1978, and eventually became the county attorney. While serving as assistant county attorney, Gus handled many criminal cases and became a real student of criminal law. He served as the attorney and chief collective bargaining negotiator for the Oelwein schools. He also served general counsel to Upper Iowa University in Fayette.

Gus was a lifelong Democrat and Methodist. He was very active in politics, the church, and the community. He was an active member of the Jaycees, Chamber of Commerce, Fayette County Crime Commission, Oelwein School Board, Industrial Development Board, and City Council. He received numerous awards for his civic activities.

In 1993, Gus was appointed to the bench as a District Associate Judge, a position he held until his mandatory retirement in 2006. His vast experience in criminal law, qualified him highly for his position on the bench. He was widely respected as a wise and fair judicial officer. He served on the Board of Directors of the Iowa Judges Association and on the District Associate Judge committee. He served as a judge for the National College and University Mock Trial competition at Drake Law School from 1992.

He married Suzanne Sharp in August 1957. To that union were born three daughters – Kimberly, Caroline and Katie. He dearly loved his wife, daughters, sons-in-law, and grandchildren. Family always came first, even before his profession, as it rightly should.

He was preceded in death by his parents and daughter Caroline Thompson.

He was survived by his wife of 49 years, Suzanne, daughters Kim Becker of Dubuque and Katie Slivovsky of Western Springs, Illinois and their husbands Chris Becker and Jim Slivovsky, son-in-law John Thompson of Cedar Falls, and 5 grandchildren.

Madam President, I move that this memorial be spread across the pages of this association and a copy sent to Gus's wife Sue.