

Murray and Beth Johnson

Nursing Scholarship



A life well lived is a precious gift

By most any measure, Murray Johnson lived life well. His life was filled with family and friends from many parts of the world, and he treasured each special connection.

Murray was born in 1915 in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada, and moved with his family to Nebraska at the age of twelve. After high school, he farmed with his father for four years before deciding to pursue college. He enrolled at Nebraska State Teachers College in Chadron and signed up for the football team. Murray proved his competence in the classroom and on the football field. In 1942, he graduated with a degree in physics and recognition for four seasons of varsity football

accomplishments. That same year, Murray became a citizen of the United States, joined the Army, and prepared to do his part during World War II. He served for 41 months, primarily in the South Pacific, in the medical corps caring for casualties.

In 1943, before going overseas, Murray and his college sweetheart, Beth Rogers, were married. Upon his return, Beth and Murray settled in Richland, Washington, where he was employed for seven years with General Electric Corporation. Ready for a new adventure, Murray and Beth purchased the Dakota Trading Post at Fort Totten, North Dakota. The Trading Post was located in the heart of the Devils Lake Sioux Indian Reservation (now known as Spirit Lake Nation) and served as the center of commerce for the region. It stocked a wide variety of merchandise from hardware, to food, to clothing, to beading supplies ... to nearly anything people needed for daily living. The Johnsons operated the Trading Post from 1953 to 1972. In 1954, Murray became the postmaster and served as Fort Totten's postmaster for 28 years.

Connections made through the post office or the Trading Post allowed Murray and Beth to become acquainted with nearly everyone in the region. Their customers soon became their friends. The four Johnson children—Richard, Roger, Kathryn, and Robert—helped with Trading Post operations and also made lifelong friendships with the tribal children who frequented the store. The Johnsons enrolled their children in the reservation-based

elementary schools, a very uncommon decision for non-Indian families. As the Johnson children aged into junior high, Murray and Beth formed carpools with tribal families who wanted to send their children to Devils Lake, thirteen miles to the north, rather than to Indian boarding schools in South Dakota.

Murray and Beth modeled deep respect for tribal traditions and for their Native American friends while concurrently cultivating friendships with people from all walks of life throughout the region. They attended the Presbyterian Church in Devils Lake. Murray was active in the Masonic Lodge and was an avid sports fan, attending countless school-based sporting events. Beth was an education advocate and a patron of the arts. She is fondly remembered for her tireless work to launch and sustain the Fort Totten Little Theatre.

Murray and Beth were unique in their ability to be equally comfortable on the reservation and in the largely non-Indian communities that surrounded the reservation. This special knack for navigating cultures was never flaunted, but was simply a part of who they were. It lives on today in the lives of their children and grandchildren and in others for whom they provided inspiration.

The Murray and Beth Johnson Nursing Scholarship is a fitting legacy for a life well lived. Earnings from this endowment support scholarships for students enrolled in the Nursing program at Lake Region State College. ●