



Ron Johnson

6/27/1946 – 8/9/2025

Ronald “Ronnie” Russell Johnson was born on June 27, 1946, in Washington, DC. He was one of four children of the late A. Helen Bates Johnson and Jesse L. Johnson. Two sisters, Beverly Purvis of Smithfield, Virginia, and Ruby Camille, preceded him in death.

At an early age, Ron thought he had three sets of parents. In those days parents left the south to work in D.C. and left Ron in Fountain Inn, SC with his grandfather, “Jim Bates” and wife “Annie Bates”. He was also parented by their son and wife “Uncle Wesley” and “Aunt Bitty” who were his second set. When it was time for school, they’d put him on a train up north to live with his parents, “Jesse and Helen Johnson” until it was time to go south for school breaks. Ron was grateful for his grandfather for teaching him good marksmanship, and the art of raising German Shepard dogs. But most of all, the lessons of family values and living in the segregated south.

He was raised Presbyterian at Tabor United Presbyterian Church where he met his best friend and “brother from another mother” Roderick Calloway. They both attended McKinley and were proud to be “Techites” and participated in cadets and the track team. Some fifteen years later, Rod and Ronnie would celebrate the Fourth of July holidays with friends on the McKinley campus.

Ron enlisted into the US Air Force in 1964 at age 18 during the Vietnam War and was honorably discharged in 1970. Once he was discharged, Ron started working at Radiation Systems Inc (RSI) installing Ground Systems antennas.

After a few years, Ron started at COMSAT Laboratories in Clarksville, MD in the Transponders Department aka System Measurements, reporting to Christoph Mahle. Chris was promoted and

Vasilis Riginos became the manager of that Department. Ron was an important lynch pin in the In-Orbit Test work where he performed IOT installations, ordered all equipment and kept track of parts and deliverables. In 1980, now roommates in White Oak, MD, Rod and Ron were both working for COMSAT. Rod having been a spacecraft technician for Grumman Copernicus Satellite was hired by COMSAT as a Senior Satellite controller at COMSAT's control center in L'Enfant Plaza and Ron a Field Engineer and Station Manager. Ron traveled all over the world primarily working with Joe Bruno "his partner in crime," Marco Urcuyo, and Steve Teller. His first IOT years were at COMSAT Laboratories and transitions to IOT Systems after the merger with Lockheed Martin. At IOT Systems Ron played an even more central role. Then when IOT had some trouble, Ron started his own company and provided support for IOT Systems customers including Intelsat. Ron truly loved traveling and experiencing different cultures.

In 1995 Ron felt close to Chris and Vasilis and when they retired in 1995, he started the annual "First Wednesday in December" luncheons for these COMSAT retirees and others to keep the work family together. He organized this group for 20+ years.

Ron had a wry sense of humor, loved jazz, blues and R&B music but was obsessed with Dungeons and Dragons. He played chess, read science fiction, and would meet annually with friends Micki, Karen, and Jan for the east coast jazz festivals. Ron had a deep sense of civic responsibility – he served as President of the Greenfields at Brandermill Condominium Association for many years even while working overseas. Ron had his favorite saying that everyone remembered: Tempus fugit; Tastes like a good idea; How, what, when, where, and to what extent.

He leaves to cherish his memory: two sisters, Gloria Parker (Arvel – deceased) of St. Louis; Audrey (Charles) of Odenton, MD; his best friend Roderick Calloway, whom he befriended at age 13; his sister/cousin Wanza Bates who made him laugh while in Malta House; and other cousins; nieces/nephews; friends from COMSAT/Lockheed Martin; his adopted granddaughter and apple of his eye "Reilly", and his favorite caregiver Onyeka Shominure who made him dance.