



John Howard Burns

December 12, 1913 - May 6, 2017

John Howard Burns was born December 12, 1913 to Arthur and Susette Matthews Burns in Pauls Valley, Oklahoma, and died on May 6, 2017 at his home in Pauls Valley. John grew up in Pauls Valley helping in his father's hardware and farming business, and spending summers working at his family's ranch near Albany, Texas.

John graduated from Pauls Valley High School, attended Dennison University, and completed his degree in government at the University of Oklahoma. He was a member of Sigma Nu fraternity.

Shortly after graduation, he worked in the Washington office of Senator Mike Monroney, then entered the United States Foreign Service. During a thirty year career, he served in posts around the world, including appointments as ambassador to the Central African Republic and Tanzania. He retired as Director General of the Foreign Service.

Following his retirement in 1971, John enjoyed many happy decades pursuing his wide and varied interests. In 1979, he was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. That same year he and other members of his family established Tio's Mexican Restaurant in Pauls Valley.

A great lover of nature, some of his favorite trips were hiking, rafting, and wilderness camping. He visited every National Park.

John had a lifelong affection for the family ranch and during his retirement spent a significant amount of his time there enjoying his large, extended family.

He was blessed with good health which allowed him to live comfortably in his home during his final years.

Preceding John in death were his parents, two sisters; Susanne Burns Payne and husband Dr. Warren Payne, Betty Burns Densmore and husband Chauncey Densmore.

He is survived by his nieces Susan Payne Wilson, Sarah Payne Johnston, Marsha Densmore, and his nephew, Arthur Burns Densmore, and many close great nieces, nephews and cousins.

Graveside services are scheduled for 2:00 p.m. Thursday, May 11, 2017 at Mt. Olivet Cemetery with Rev. Pam Normile officiating. Services are under the direction of Wooster Funeral Home. You may send a condolence to the family at www.woosterfuneralhomes.com

Cemetery Details

Mt. Olivet Cemetery

Hwy 77
Pauls Valley, Ok

Previous Events

Service

MAY 11. 2:00 PM (CT)

Mt. Olivet Cemetery
Hwy 77
Pauls Valley, Ok

Tribute Wall



“ *John Howard Burns*

November 12, 2022 at 02:44 AM

KB

“ *Hello, family of John Burns. I was saddened to learn of his recent death. Although I didn't really know him well, he was so kind to my husband and me when we lived in Tanzania in the late 1960s, and I thought you might appreciate this anecdote. We were living in a inremote Tanzanian village where my husband was doing field work for his dissertation in anthropology. We went to the "big city" of Tabora, about two hours away, about once a month to get groceries, drop off film, and have tea at the beautiful old railway hotel. On one visit, we ran into a Peace Corps friend who invited us to come into the hotel dining room to meet John. We chatted and he urged us to join him--lunch was on him! We were so pleased because we were poor grad students and couldn't afford lunch at the hotel. I don't remember what we ate, but I do remember the good conversation and John's warmth. He learned that we enjoyed reading The New Yorker and offered to send on his back copies after he read them--and he kept his promise! Those magazine issues were such a treat in a place where conversation and reading were the key means of entertainment. I've always appreciated his kindness. He seemed such a fine person. My condolences to his family members--know that John had a special place in my memories.*

Katie Baer

Katie Baer - January 17, 2018 at 04:10 PM

DJ

“ *We are sad to learn of John's death. He lived a productive life for which you were fortunate to have him so long. You will all have many happy memories to share with each other in the future. Our prayers and sympathy are with you all. God bless you all.*



David and Wilma Jones - May 10, 2017 at 08:58 PM

SB

“ *John was one of the finest men I ever knew....ranks right up there with Chauncey and my Dad, Earl Cook. This country and of course our town is better off because he lived. He lived a remarkable and exciting life...and I am glad he shared himself with us. What a delight he was and he will certainly be missed.*

Sharon (Cook) Brown - May 09, 2017 at 02:11 PM

SA

“ John Burns was a dear friend to the Burks family for over 40 years. He was a wonderful host and conversationalist. His daily journaling inspired me to start doing the same; a habit that has helped me and for which I will be forever grateful to him. Pauls Valley and the world benefited from his life here on earth. RIP John, you will be missed. Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family.

Sam Anderson

Sam Anderson - May 09, 2017 at 09:47 AM

LS

There are truly so many wonderful memories of times shared with John but my personal favorite was the evening he shared one of his favorite lines from "Dedicatory Ode" by Hilaire Belloc.

*"From quiet homes and first beginnings,
Out to the undiscovered ends,
There's nothing worth the wear of winning,
But laughter and the love of friends."*

Thanks for the memories, laughter and friendship.

Lynn Sisney

lynn sisney - May 10, 2017 at 05:46 PM

MC

Uncle John was my godfather and I so wish I could have known him better once I became an adult. Clearly, he was a dear friend of my fathers due to their mutual love and respect for the Foreign Service. He reached out to me a few years ago- he must have been in his 90's and encouraged me to go out and buy a bottle of champagne with the small gift he sent. The note made me smile then and makes me smile now thinking of him.
So grateful he was in your lives for so long and that he passed at home- both gifts. To a life well-lived!

Margaret Creel - May 22, 2017 at 06:48 PM

JC

Dear family and friends of John Burns,

Polly and I are truly sorry that we were not aware of this website until now when almost a year has passed since John's death. I was a Foreign Service officer until I retired in 1979. Polly and I had the great good fortune to serve at the American Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania from July 14, 1965 until July 1970, after John Burns's departure in 1969.

John Burns was the best man I ever worked for in the Foreign Service and the most admirable as a colleague. He gave all of us at that small embassy great latitude in doing our jobs and I think as a result we all did our very best every day. I was the Economic officer and I churned out a pretty good volume of reports, which I signed as Drafting Officer, but John read every one of them before signing his name at the end of the report. His was the final responsibility for the report. In all those months we worked together John never asked me to change a single word in any of them. I am still very proud that I was able to earn his confidence to that extent.

Polly and I remained in contact with John through the years and we telephoned him from time to time, usually around his birthday, but we also phoned him a short time before his passing and had a good last conversation.

John was very fond of our seven children, who were all with us in Dar and our whole family sends John's family and friends our deepest sympathy for the passing of this good man.

*Jim and Polly Curran
Peterborough, NH*

Jim and Polly Curran - March 31, 2018 at 07:43 PM

JC

Polly and I regret very much that we have just found this website so long after John's death. I am a retired Foreign Service officer who had the honor and pleasure to serve in the American Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania when John was the Ambassador there. Polly and I and our seven children look back on those few years as the best part of our Foreign Service life, thanks mainly to John, John was the best person I ever worked for in the Service, one of the most amiable and likable men I have ever met. As the sole Economic Officer on a small staff, I wrote a substantial number of reports in my time, which carried my name as drafting officer, but had to be approved and signed by the ambassador. John read everything carefully -- he had the final responsibility. He never changed a word of anything I wrote and to this day I feel honored to have earned his confidence so completely. Polly and all our children remember John fondly although it is 49 years since John left Tanzania.

James C Curran - April 01, 2018 at 07:53 PM