

NOEL E. JOHNSON 1920-2009

# Attorney later in life

## Education career first, then the law

By Joan Giangrasse Kates  
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Noel E. Johnson had certainly earned a quiet retirement after a long career in teaching and years of part-time work as a tax preparation specialist.

"She did all that while raising two kids," said her son, Brian Brazda.

However, injustices that Mrs. Johnson perceived in the legal system, and in society in general, prompted her to dust off a nearly 50-year-old University of Chicago law degree and begin another career in her 70s as a lawyer. She served as a defense attorney for clients that ranged from accused gang members to fellow teachers who felt they had been wrongfully terminated from their jobs.

"She believed everyone deserved the best legal defense possible," her son said. "It



Noel E. Johnson, a former educator, began her full-time law practice in her 70s.

was important to the system if justice was to prevail."

Mrs. Johnson, 88, of Indian Head Park, a well-known defense attorney and former chairwoman of the business department at Daley College in Chicago, died Sunday, Jan. 18, in ManorCare Health Services in Hinsdale after suffering a stroke about a month ago.

Born on Christmas in Worcester, Mass., Mrs. Johnson grew up on the South Side, the eldest of five. After graduating from Englewood

High School, she attended Wilson Junior College for two years. She received a bachelor's degree from the U. of C., where in 1944 she was one of just six women to receive a law degree.

Following law school, Mrs. Johnson taught for a few years at elementary schools in Chicago and Willow Springs. In 1948, she married Lumir Brazda, with whom she had a son and daughter. He died in 1958.

In 1960, Mrs. Johnson began teaching full time at Wilson while also doing legal tax work on the side for Mason Tax Service in Chicago.

"Her hands were full trying to support our family and keeping up with us and all our school activities," recalled her daughter, Lois Brazda.

Mrs. Johnson was married in 1967 to Philip Johnson, also a college professor, whom she came to know while walking the picket line for the Cook County College Teachers Union. He died in 1989.

In 1968, Mrs. Johnson accepted a full-time teaching position at Daley College, where she rose to chairwoman of the business depart-

ment before her departure in 1992.

"Noel was a lively and engaging individual, equally as competent in the classroom as she was in the courtroom," said longtime friend Norm Swenson, founder and former president of the college teachers union. "She was a very popular professor who always had long lines for her classes."

Mrs. Johnson began her full-time law practice in the early 1990s, handling both civil and criminal cases. She was married a third time in 1996 to Richard Samuels, a Circuit Court judge. He died in 2001.

For many years, Mrs. Johnson also was the social chairwoman of the teachers union.

"She had incredible charm and energy that drew people to her," Swenson said.

Other survivors include two stepdaughters, Nancy Johnson Stout and Karen Johnson Kelly.

Visitation will be held from 3 to 9 p.m. Thursday and Friday in Hollowell & James Funeral Home, 1025 W. 55th St., Countryside. Services will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday in the funeral home.

<http://LawyerNoel.com>