



Gretchen S. Johnson

November 20, 1949 - May 19, 2022

Gretchen S. Johnson, age 72, of Chicago, IL, formerly of Cambridge, MA, and Richmond, IL, passed away Thursday, May 19, 2022, in Fontana, WI.

She was born in Wabasha, MN, on November 20, 1949, to the late Donald W. and Virginia T. (Averbeck) Johnson.

“Aunt Gretchie” was the life of family gatherings always wearing a smile and often laughing with her nieces, nephews, and their children.

She hosted many outings including Bulls games and trips to the Magnificent Mile that were never forgotten special events.

At the same time, her devotion to her career was unparalleled. She was always excited about her next venture.

Gretchen graduated from Richmond-Burton Community High School in 1968. After receiving a B.S. from Western Illinois University, Gretchen began her career, teaching business at Barrington High School, in IL. Upon receiving an M.S. in Administration, she became Dean of Students at Barrington.

Her love of the city prompted her to leave teaching and begin a sales career in downtown Chicago. That decision ultimately led her to commercialization and executive management positions with several companies. With 30 years of experience in the biotech field, she was an innovator in the commercialization of cell-based products.

At Biosurface Technology, which was then sold to Genzyme, she

commercialized the first cellular therapy ever, which resulted in early adoption of novel autologous cell therapies.

Later, Gretchen was founder and CEO of KeraCure, Inc., a tissue regeneration company where she grew all aspects of the business. She was a co-founder and most recently, CEO of Tract Therapeutics, a company focused on unique cellular therapy to regulate a patient's immune system.

In addition to working with these companies, she was an active in the programs aimed at mentoring start-up life science companies. She also served as a member of the Illinois Biotechnology Innovation Organization and as a Board member for two additional early stage biotech companies. She also taught at Northwestern's Kellogg School of Business.

She is survived by her twin sister, Greta (Tom) Lesniak, of Minooka, IL; sister Kathy (David) Rappaport, of Fontana WI and Sanibel, FL; brother Gregory (Cathy) Johnson, of Geneva, IL.; seven nieces and nephews: Luke Lesniak, Jake Lesniak, Maggie Brandenburg, Sam Lesniak, Jennifer Clumpner, Gregory Clumpner, Alex Johnson; and nine great nieces and nephews.

Interment will be in Richmond Cemetery in Richmond, IL, with a private family gathering. A Celebration of Life is pending in Chicago. Memorials may be made to your favorite charity.

For more information, please call 815-678-7311 or visit ehornadams.com.

Cemetery Details

Richmond Cemetery

5800 Broadway Rd.
Richmond, IL 60071

Events

Details are pending.

Tribute Wall

PB

“ Dear Gretchen's Family,
I don't know if you will see this now since it has been a few years since Gretchen's passing but I wanted to express my feelings for her.
Gretchen hired me at BioSurface. I came from a nursing background.
She taught me so much about the business world, how to present myself, etiquette in general. I lost a mentor when she left Genzyme. I left almost immediately after her leaving.
I reached out to her a couple of times since then to express my gratitude to her. She even offered me another job...lol.
I googled her tonight to see what she is up to these days and learned of her passing.
I am devastated, and so sorry that I am just finding this info out.
May she RIP and thank you again, Gretchen for being a part of my life.
Patricia Roche Bernero

Patricia Bernero - August 19, 2025 at 12:07 AM

PB

Seeing the typos. Should have proofread before posting. Gretchen would not be happy with me!

Patricia Bernero - August 19, 2025 at 12:12 AM



“ Gretchen S. Johnson

January 29, 2023 at 06:51 AM

IC

“ *Gretchen was my boss and first real mentor at Genzyme in the 90s.*

She was always full of life and energy, I'm sad to learn of her passing.

Ian Chin - July 21, 2022 at 06:44 AM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Gretchen S. Johnson.*



June 05, 2022 at 08:29 PM

KO

“ *Gretchen was a dear friend and sorority sister and always had a special place in my heart and memories. So sorry to all.*
Kathi O'Donnell

Kathi OD - May 30, 2022 at 09:40 PM

AK

“ *A teacher should never have to bury a student. I am so sad. She was such a happy person when I knew her. She accomplished so much in her lifetime that had to make you so proud of her. My sympathy to you Greta, Kathy and Greg and your families.*
Ann Katzenberg

Ann Katzenberg - May 29, 2022 at 10:22 AM

DN

“ Thoughts and prayers are with all the Johnson family during this time of sorrow. Gretchen was a role model to me in high school and an ASA Sorority sister in college at WIU. Thinking of all of you, De Niececki

De Niececki - May 28, 2022 at 11:31 AM

MS

“ Greta, Greg and Kathy, my deepest sympathy and condolences on the loss of Gretchen. My heart goes out to you and your families. May she Rest In Peace with the knowledge of the love of family and great pride in her personal accomplishments. Murray Savage

Murray Savage - May 27, 2022 at 09:07 PM

LS

“ God must have needed an element of FUN in heaven! There was never a dull moment with Gretchen around-what exciting times we had at Western with those sisters. Our condolences to the whole family-we know how much you'll miss her.
With much love,
John and Lindy Hallquist Steeves

Lindy Steeves - May 24, 2022 at 10:38 AM

LA

“ I met Gretchen and Greta in college. Gretchen was such a sweetheart as is her twin. My deepest sympathies go out to the entire family. Love to all
Linda North Aavang

Linda Aavang - May 24, 2022 at 08:11 AM

KB

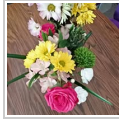
“ *Many condolences to you all! Gretchen was a wonderful friend although grade and high school! So many heartwarming memories growing up with her. Enjoyed celebrating with her at our 50th high school reunion. Holding you all in the light with prayers of comfort.*

Kristen Borre - May 23, 2022 at 05:06 PM

WS

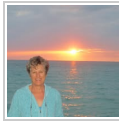
My heart goes out to Gretchen's family. Prayers to all.

Wendy Steinmetz/Hicks - May 23, 2022 at 06:22 PM



My deepest sympathies go out to Greta, Cathy and Greg.

Bonnie Luttenbacher - May 24, 2022 at 09:17 PM



I'm so sorry to hear this. I well remember the twins from High School. They were both so liked and fun. So glad we got to reconnect at the 50th HS Reunion.

Jane Amundsen - May 25, 2022 at 11:09 PM

BW

“ *My sympathy to Gretchen's family. I remember you all and your years living in Richmond. De went to Wester to college because of you girls I am sure. This goes back many years. Praying for you all.*
Betty Waspi

betty waspi - May 23, 2022 at 12:37 PM