

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF NICK JOHNSON
1951

[Note: What 17-year-old would even think about writing an "autobiography"? I can't recall writing it, but because it was written in the beginning of my senior year in high school can only guess -- though with what the CIA would call "high probability" -- that it was required by some college's admission process. The original was found and sent to me by my daughter, Julie Johnson, in 2022. I was aided in the preparation and posting of this copy by my son, Gregory Johnson. The text below has not been "edited" or otherwise modified in order to maintain the integrity of writing done by a 17-year-old.
– Nicholas Johnson, Iowa City, Iowa, June 2022.]

My name is Nick Johnson. I was born in Iowa City a little over seventeen years ago. Many factors have helped to shape my rather short life into the satisfying thing it has been.

For the past ten years I have lived in the house my family now occupies. During my entire life my father has taught in the University of Iowa and my mother has never worked outside of our home, so that life has been rather stable for me. I have one sister, Katy Lou, who is four years younger than I, and with my parents has helped to create a situation for which none of us has ever been sorry -- for more than five or ten minutes at a time anyway -- to be a part.

I have attended the University's schools since I was two years old: pre-school for three years, junior primary, grade school, junior high and now high school. Through the school I have been able to make acquaintances with many boys and girls not only from backgrounds similar to my own, but also from non-university Iowa City backgrounds and from the rural districts around Iowa City. Right now I number among my closest friends a doctor's son, a golf pro's daughter, a hospital employee's son who has decided to become a minister, a University policeman's daughter, a farmer's son, the daughter of the head of the University's School of Social Work, and the University photographer's son. The University schools have had, however, another effect upon my life, and, school having been a substantial part of that life for about fifteen years now, a rather important one. My teachers, particularly in high school, have been for the most part instructors in a teacher training program, and are, therefore, vitally interested in their own teaching,

classes, and students and, quite frankly, it not only shows, but rubs off. Combined with the presence of friends of my parents from this and other universities, it has produced a constantly stimulated interest in learning. Incidentally, the courses which have been of the most interest to me have changed enough from time to time to make the selection of any one favorite course rather difficult. At one time or another I have been most interested in science, mathematics, and speech, and now I suppose my greatest interest lies in the social sciences.

In view of this background my outside hobbies and interests should be somewhat easier to understand. First, nearly all my interests have involved children of my own age or older, in groups of various sizes. I have never been much interested in building things (i.e., airplanes, bird houses, soap box racers and the like), and my attempts at such have usually not been "remarkable examples of workmanship." When I developed an interest in radio, therefore, it was limited for the most part to listening to short wave, reading theories and attending classes taught by a Naval Reserve officer. My radios, although they worked, generally had too much solder on the connections and in other ways did not command the respect of my contemporaries. My interest in photography, however, involved darkrooms as well as cameras and books. At the age of ten or so, my liking for law and police work not only had me going to bed with the 1939 Code of Iowa in place of a storybook, but also led to my forming the "Junior Bureau of Investigation" which "covered" all of Iowa City and parts of the surrounding county. This organization made a study of law; attended for two years the Iowa Peace Officers' Short Course (incidentally receiving some of the highest grades in the course); wrote to Mr. Hoover periodically for information about the F.B.I.; made the rounds of the police station, post office, and sheriff's office for old "wanted posters"; and studied fingerprinting and police method from the shelves of the director of the Police Division of the University's Bureau of Public Affairs. Baseball, automobiles and "weather" all went through about the same processes.

My extra-curricular interests have included debate, radio speaking, discussion, and dramatics; band, orchestra, pep band, German band, marching band, and swing band; football, basketball and track; Hi-Y, Lettermen's Club, Dramatics Club, and the Science Club; and Student Council. Of these, I feel Hi-Y, Student Council and the speech activities have been of the most "value" and interest; and although they've all been interesting I should probably give mention to the swing band, "The Rhythmairs," as an activity I especially enjoyed.

From many of these school activities, of course, have developed other opportunities for what were to me some impressive and possibly more worthwhile experiences.

From Hi-Y has come the privilege not only to listen to great speakers but to take part in discussions, lead discussions and give speeches myself at camps and conferences on the district, state, area and national levels. The effect of the Sixth National Hi-Y Congress, and the experience of presiding over its meetings at Cleveland and then at Oberlin, is something which will probably never leave me. By virtue of my being national president of Hi-Y I am also a member of the Executive Council of the United Christian Youth Movement, which has given me the opportunity to meet many of the nation's young "religious leaders." Incidentally, one of my more interesting experiences connected with Hi-Y was that of riding a bicycle about three hundred miles to an Area Hi-Y camp near Milwaukee.

I have gained a somewhat similar type of experience from student council activities. Actually the only difference has been that I have done my presiding on the local and state levels, although I have attended two national conventions.

I have taken part in Boy Scout activities -- although, they haven't been very extensive and a troop wasn't always easily accessible. This last year I became more interested in church activities and am now usher at Iowa City's First Unitarian Church. I have been a member of Iowa City's Paper Doll Club for many years. It is an organization which has at its disposal the facilities of the community's Recreation Center. When I was ten years old another boy and I spent the better part of a weekend circulating a petition for a municipal swimming pool, and we obtained over three hundred signatures. We took this petition to a meeting of the City Council where I made a "speech" about it. We got our pool. To complete the story I ought to add that, although I consider it a weekend well spent, due to a condition diagnosed as rhinitis when I was six or so I have not to this day swum in that pool.

I have spent a large share of my working life -- about four and one-half years -- as a paper boy. I feel that the early hours, the bills to be paid every Saturday morning, the relationship with the customers, and the responsibility these put on

me did much good. I then worked for the University Hospital's Employees' Cafeteria for about a year and a half. The rest of the helpers there were mostly college boys, many of them, foreign, students. Serving as cashier at the Hospital was the position which I honorably left last summer in favor of odd jobs. Conventions, camps, and football practice made it impossible for me to be employed in a steady job. So last summer was spent building Quonset huts for a feed company, unloading pipe from railroad cars for the Great Lakes Pipe Line Company, and digging out a basement and helping to move books into the new University Library for S.U.I.

My future plans depend to some degree, of course, upon what Congress and my draft board decide. Aside from that I am looking forward to receiving a good liberal arts education as preparation for whatever I go into. I have seen and heard of all too many students who have chosen their vocation in high school, who go on to college to receive their "training," and end up coming out of college "well trained" (maybe), but uneducated certainly. I seem to have been semi-successful in the past at winning elections, and perhaps, therefore, I should go into politics – I do enjoy the social sciences. I like people and seem to get along with them well, so maybe I should go into business. I enjoy learning; possibly I should try to become a teacher. I also enjoy discovering, wording, and solving problems; it might be that I would find research to my liking. I devote a lot of time to thinking about what I might go into, but I don't feel that I am now educated to the point where I can wisely make any serious occupational choices. As I have indicated, at the present time I am mainly interested in receiving a good education.

###