

## CAROL JOHNSTON FEARON

While Carol traces her ancestry to the Ithaca/Dryden area of Central New York, she was born to Elmer and Christine Nesbett Johnston in Cheyenne, Oklahoma. At the time, her mother was living with her parents in Chickasha while Elmer was at war in the Philippines as a survey engineer. Christine's doctor, going to war himself, had his patients choose between Cheyenne and Laramie Wyoming for their births. Christine chose Cheyenne, the state capital. She and Carol lived in Chickasha for two years until after the war. Elmer was released from the military in Manila in 1945 on Carol's 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday. He always said that her birth was his birthday present for that year. Christine was an only child of an only child. She was born in Snyder, TX. She and her parents moved to Chickasha where an aunt and uncle had opened a grocery store. Christine attended college to become a Home Economics teacher but did not start teaching until Carol was in high school. Elmer lost his mother to pneumonia during the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918. She was pregnant with her 9<sup>th</sup> child. Elmer was 11 and the oldest sibling was 14. Elmer's father was a farmer in Wyoming raised the children himself, remarrying only after the children were grown. Carol and her siblings were close with their many Johnston cousins sharing holidays and other celebrations with the extended families.



When Carol was six years old, her parents settled in Casper, Wyoming where Elmer eventually opened his own surveying business. Carol, her sister and brother, grew up in a middle-class neighborhood. Lynn Vincent, who later married former Vice President Dick Cheney, lived across the street and gave baton twirling instructions in the yard. Despite the popular view of Wyoming as cowboy state, Casper was cultured urbanized city. Carol remembers going to art museums and to the symphony. Carol graduated from high school in 1961 and the local community college two years later. She went on to Oklahoma State Teachers College where she met her husband George. They both attended Kansas State University where she was awarded a BA and an MA in Education and Library Science and he earned the same MA after his BA in history from OSU. After graduation, they taught school in Kansas, George for six years and Carol for two, until she became the mother of a son, David born in Stillwater, OK and daughter, Angela, Wichita, KS.



In the late 1960's, school systems around the country were beginning to consolidate and develop school libraries that required certified librarians. Few schools were looking for more than one librarian, but Carol and George answered an ad from the Union Springs Schools which was looking for two. The school district flew them to New York for interviews, which led to both being hired. They raised their children in their home on Spring Street for 17 years until building a home on the lake north of the village. George worked at Union Springs, retiring after 36 years. He was active in local town and county politics for many years. When the district cut back on librarians, Carol was hired by the Waterloo district as an elementary librarian which she did until retirement. Carol, an avid reader, has a special passion for children's literature and has an extensive library for children that has been enjoyed by her seven grandchildren and other extended family members.



In addition to her passion for books and reading, which began in her childhood, Carol has always been involved with music. As a child, she took piano and violin lessons. She was also fascinated by her aunt's organ. She taught herself guitar and as an adult, took organ lessons. She became the full-time organist at her church and has been in that role for over 27 years. For reasons she cannot explain however, it is playing her banjo that brings her the most joy. She also plays piano for church services and entertainment at local nursing homes and the banjo whenever she can.

Carol names her mother and grandmother as personal role models and shares many of their interests. She says that the greatest challenge of her life was living and raising her children so far from her extended family. Despite the distance, she and her sister in Colorado and brother in California, have always maintained an intimate interest in and relationship with each other's children. The cousins are closer than many who live near each other. Steeped in women's history, she holds both Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton in high esteem as role models for girls and women. Carol's interest in politics began in college, although she has since left political activity to her husband. Carol likes to travel and especially likes to visit Wyoming. While their children were young, as teachers, she and George were able to travel extensively during the summer. They have camped in all 49 states (traveled to 50) and visited most of the 67 national parks over the years. They believed that such travel, and the history that goes with it, is an important part of a child's education. Carol's family lived and visited relatives across Wyoming, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas. Coming from western states, where any travel meant distance traveling, such journeys are not unusual. It was only four generations back that her ancestors worked their way across the country to eventually settle in Wyoming.

As Carol traced her genealogy back to New York and beyond, she discovered a grandmother related to Martha Washington. She has her mother's journal and several family heirlooms, most valuable to her. Perhaps thinking of her family's western migration, she has a special affinity for historic sites like the Oregon and Mormon trails, which she remembers visiting as a child. Several years ago, she joined a group retracing a western trail by horse drawn covered wagon, often driving the wagon herself. She takes pride in Wyoming's history regarding women. It was the first state to ratify suffrage for women. That act almost prevented the state for being admitted to the United States when Congress demanded that the state repeal suffrage to join. The women of Wyoming sent a letter to congress saying, "drop us if you must. We trust our men to support suffrage". The men of Wyoming sent a letter to congress saying that they were going to keep the statute, which was named after the first female governor in North America, Nellie Ross. The state was admitted; the statute stayed. Coming back to New York, especially so near Seneca Falls, Carol has come full circle, geographically and genetically. She carries the pioneer spirit in both directions. As to how she would like to be known and remembered...she would like to be remembered as someone who brings joy to others through music at church, in nursing homes, and at home with family.

