

# Jerry Johnson

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by Paul Johnston, The Texas Caver, March 1995, p. 32.

Last June 1994, the caving community lost one of its members. Jerry (**Jerold Robert Johnson**) died suddenly while attending a career meeting. Even though a physician was present and did all of the right things, his life was quickly gone.

I met Jerry in September 1968 when he joined the Texas University Underwater Society. Jerry and I found that we shared caving and diving interests.

Jerry has done much caving in Texas and in Mexico. Caving with Jerry was always an adventure. Camping on the beach of Tampico, Mexico; going to Gruta del Palmito, spending New Year's Eve at the end of Huasteca Canyon and listening to Edward G. Marshall's Mystery Hour on the radio; spending two weeks in Mexico seeing Mexico City and touring the ruins of Teotihuacan; waiting for Jerry and Wayne Russell to finish a cave dive at Carrizal Cave are just a few of the caving memories I have of Jerry and caving.

One of the fondest memories I have of Jerry in Mexico was that of arriving at a caving site around 9 or 10 p.m. and not knowing exactly where the cave was located. As usual, Jerry was our group's main Spanish speaker. We sent him up to a grass hut to ask directions to the cave. We not only got instructions but a man and his son came out to personally guide us to the cave. After seeing the cave and on our way back to the campsite we did get lost. Eventually our road ended and we pulled out into a huge clearing that was also a corn field. The sky was full of stars. We all hopped out of the truck to see where we were. The night sky was absolutely beautiful with stars. I mentioned that I wished that I knew the names of the stars. At this point, Jerry went to the back of the truck and shuffled through the equipment and came back with a star map. The group of people were speechless. I had never discussed astronomy with Jerry but he was always prepared for anything.

Jerry introduced me to amateur radio in the late 60s. His call was WA5RON. On various camping trips, I would talk to Jerry using Morse Code. A big thrill was when I was diving the Blue Hole in Belize and talked to Jerry while I was aboard ship and Jerry was driving down a Texas highway in his car. Jerry was very knowledgeable about the archeology of Mexico and South America. He graduated from the University of Texas in 1972 with a degree in anthropology and continued post-graduate work in archeology. He was also an electronic whiz. He worked as a computer programmer and designer of radar test equipment. His last job was taking theoretical ideas of scientists and making them work.

Recently, some of my most favorite times with Jerry have been over lunch. Not only could I ask him technical questions on some type of project I was thinking of, but we would trade information on various topics that were of interest to us. I really enjoyed these meetings. A couple of weeks before his death, he told me that he had some parts for a project of mine. After his death, I was helping his wife make arrangements for his things. I opened up his car trunk and there were the parts he had promised me.

I have known Jerry over half my life and all of my adult years. The words “dependable, faithful, solid as a rock, punctual, a man of his word,” are a few of the terms that could be used to describe this man. I was looking forward to sharing adventures with him for another 30 or 40 more years. I have been cheated out of a valuable friend and I will miss him.