

J.T. Johnson Biography

J. T. "Tom" Johnson has worked in publishing, journalism and higher education for 40 years. Currently, he is the co-founder and executive director of the Institute for Analytic Journalism and a professor emeritus of journalism at San Francisco State University. While on leave from San Francisco State in the late '90s, he served as deputy editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.



Johnson was working on his doctorate in American Studies -- focusing on the relationships between science and technology and society -- at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas when he began his journalism career as a reporter for the Topeka Capital-Journal. While in graduate school, he was a stringer for newspapers in Wichita, Kansas, and Kansas City, along with The New York Times, and United Press International. He also covered Western Missouri and Kansas for the Time-Life News Service.

Johnson moved to San Francisco in 1974 as an editor at Scientific American/W. H. Freeman and Company. He joined the faculty at San Francisco State in 1976. He continued his freelance association with Time-Life publications, covering stories throughout the West. Since 1980, he has increasingly turned to science writing, working on assignment for publications as diverse as Popular Science, OMNI, Discover, Fortune, Smithsonian, Mother Jones, Air Line Pilot, Popular Mechanics, Outside, Endless Vacation, InformationWEEK, MacWEEK and Air & Space. His work also has appeared in the Banker's Magazine (London), the Chicago Tribune, Washington Star and the Detroit Free Press.

In 1984 and '85, Johnson was a contract reporter for Time Magazine in Central America. Based in San Salvador, El Salvador, he reported on military, economic, social and political affairs in that nation and Guatemala, Mexico and Belize. He has returned to Central America many times, initially for a two-month reporting trip in the summer of 1990, supported by a grant from the Gannett Foundation, and again in the summer of 1991. He served as international observer in El Salvador's 2004 presidential election.

His current research focuses on the methodologies emerging from Complexity Studies, Geographic Information Systems, forensic accounting and performance measurement and their application to understanding change in the media and related issues of privacy. In 2011, the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs, and the Council for International Exchange of Scholars selected him for inclusion on the Fulbright Specialists Roster.

A long-time personal computer user, Johnson has reported stories ranging from early word-processing systems to large-scale management information systems. In 1985-86, he designed the networked PC system used in the SFSU Journalism Department. In the spring of 1987, he was the founding editor of MacWEEK, the first weekly news magazine for users of Macintosh computers in the business world. He was a contributing editor to InformationWEEK magazine from March 1987 until May 1990. He became West Coast correspondent for Popular Science in May 1989, a position he held until October 1990.

He is also co-author of three books: Help Yourself to a Healthy Heart (San Francisco: Mount Zion Hospital and Medical Center, 1984); The Sauna Book (New York: Harper and Row, 1977) and California from the Air (Mill Valley, CA: Squarebooks, 1981). Currently, Johnson is the director of the IAJ Press in Santa Fe.

An experienced public speaker, Johnson has delivered academic papers and lectures and appeared on television and radio talk shows and numerous panels. He has taught at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, Boston University's College of Communication and lectured and conducted workshops in England, Poland, South Africa and Latin America. He is a member of the Society of Professional Journalists, Investigative Reporters and Editors, the National Association of Science Writers, National Assoc. of Hispanic Journalists and the Online News Association.

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