



Association of Adventist Women

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# Thesba Yeaton Johnston

— Woman of the Year —

## Lifetime Achievement Award

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# 1999

Throughout a lifetime of government work, teaching, and counseling, Thesba Johnston has taken time to listen and to help.

Two men were influential in Johnston's life: Harold Johnston, her husband of 40 years, and Vermont Governor Lee Emerson, who realized Johnston had talents in addition to her secretarial skills. He promoted her from his personal secretary to "secretary of civil and military affairs for Vermont," a position not unlike lieutenant governor, which she held for seven years.

Six months after she married Harold, Johnston went back to college. However, when she emerged with a doctorate from Boston University, no jobs were available in New

England. Thus the Johnstons told the Lord they would go anywhere--except Mississippi, Alabama, or Georgia.

And He did lead them—to Georgia—to Atlanta University, an all-black college in Georgia, where they stayed for 15 years—and where Johnston was awarded the

Teaching Excellence Award in 1967. She continued her career at Andrews University, where as professor of counseling psychology she established the Community Counseling Center.

Johnston's interest in women's issues was aroused by independent Bible study where she began to realize that male translators had not always told the complete story of the



Bible writers. Then another realization dawned: “In Atlanta I saw that we wrestled the Scripture to hold Blacks down. I realized that maybe we do that to women, too,” she says.

Johnston founded the Michiana chapter of AAW and chaired the General Conference’s Women’s Commission. She also was the first woman head elder at her church.

“Her ability to weep with those who weep, mourn with those who mourn, and laugh with those who laugh makes her a trusted friend, consoler and counselor who is loved by all,” says Pastor Walter Douglas of the All Nations Seventh-day Adventist Church in Berrien Springs, Michigan, her home church.

The mother of five children, now widowed, she has continued to serve as a volunteer English teacher in Russia and China as well as to maintain a private practice as a licensed psychologist.

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