



## John Charles Chitester

July 1, 1950 - August 7, 2022

A truly unique spirit, rugged individualist, adventurer, farmer, conservationist, motorcyclist, Peace Corps volunteer, artisan woodworker, author, quirky prankster, military history and classic-TV trivia buff, gifted photographer, steadfast patriot, generous friend, loyal son, and lifelong nonconformist, John Charles Chitester quietly passed away on Sunday, August 7, 2022 in home hospice at the family's Fernwood Springs Farm in Westampton Township after spending the morning chatting with visiting friends and relatives. He was 72.

To his family, he was simply known as John or Johnny. But to everyone else in his enormous circle of friends, he was "Chicken," the cheeky childhood name given to him by classmates reflecting the family farm's well-known poultry business in the 1950s and '60s that suited his rascally, larger-than-life personality.

"Chicken" was a person of contrasts and contradictions.

Jovial and gregarious, he also treasured privacy and solitude. One minute he could be dressed in a Santa suit (the long white beard was, of course, his own) entertaining families while they chose Christmas trees for sale at the family farm stand on Woodlane Road. The next, he'd disappear into the quiet magic of snowy woods where he could find refuge from civilization's sounds and intrusions.

Usually spotted during the summer growing season in his favorite farm outfit - grimy overalls, bandana, and well-worn, holey T-shirt - few people would guess he had earned a photojournalism degree from Bowling Green State University. He was proud that some of his photographs were featured in a special exhibition at the Burlington County Library. He also wrote and illustrated a self-published children's book.

While he was a staunch supporter of the military (the ceiling of his boyhood bedroom was festooned with model fighter planes he had meticulously glued and assembled himself), and an admirer of his late father's World War II deployment in the Pacific aboard a destroyer escort, during the Vietnam War his conscience led him to serve his country in a different way. Through the Peace Corps, he lived with indigenous peoples in a remote Ecuadorian village in the Andes foothills, learning Spanish and a native dialect so he could teach them Western agricultural techniques. (A few years ago, he said he overheard the same rare dialect being spoken at the Columbus Farmers' Market and was able to engage in a conversation with some very surprised Ecuadorians.) Yet, he also supported a number of military veterans' organizations throughout his life and was a frequent hands-on volunteer restoring the U.S.S. Slater Destroyer Escort at its museum berth in Albany, N.Y. in a salute to his father's Navy service.

As a young adventurer, he explored South America's mountains, rivers and jungles; traveled through Europe and North Africa; lived for a time in Arizona where he camped in the desert and rode his motorcycle through the wilderness; climbed mountains in Spain, and hitchhiked through France, where a French truckdriver he snagged a ride with gave him a bag of fresh Normandy mussels. But he was never more grounded than when he came home to Fernwood Springs Farm, harvesting crops, revitalizing the property's Atlantic white cedar swamp with new seedlings, or plowing under a rye cover

crop to ready a field for spring planting.

He relished life, but repeatedly cheated death. Resuscitated from drowning in the farm irrigation pond at age 4; coaxed back to consciousness after suffering a concussion in a skydiving accident in Ohio in his 20s; hospitalized for a crushed chest and collapsed lung when a dead tree he was harvesting for lumber on the farm fell on him; and survived a potential climbing accident in Spain when his axe and gear plummeted down the mountainside while he clung to a ledge. And those are just a few of the incidents we know about.

He planted trees, sunflowers, and milkweed for Monarch butterflies. He laughed, sometimes drank too much beer, and treasured his friends. As a kid, he slid down the corncob mountain in the corncrib with his sisters, loved his dog Snuffy, skated on the farm's "Snake Pond," and explored frozen streams under a sparkling jangle of forest icicles with his shaggy Newfoundland dog Tracy and his sister Carol. Teenage Chicken and a partner-in-crime once mistakenly lobbed tomatoes at what turned out to be the police chief's car - then spent the next day sheepishly cleaning it up. He talked about his time playing on the same Rancocas Valley Regional High School football team as NFL great Franco Harris. He loved "Sea Hunt," any old TV western, and New Year's Eve when his Mom rang the farm bell at midnight. He liked to fire off the farm's automatic blackbird gun to keep the blackbirds out of the corn - and annoy the neighbors. He learned and spoke the 19th century Lithuanian phrases his mother taught him from her parents when they emigrated here - but that no one speaks today.

At times admittedly irascible, he was also kind and caring. During his mother's final years, he served as her caregiver so she could realize her wish to stay home on the farm as long as she could.

And, although he never married, it can be said that the farm was the love of his life. At the end, the farm - not a hospital - was where he wanted to be, spending his last days there surrounded by love and grace.

Geras Nakties, Johnny.

John was preceded in death by his parents, Carolyn and Charles Chitester. He is survived by his sisters Jeanne (Chitester) Stinger (the late William), of Palm Coast Fla. and Carol (Chitester) Saynisch (Stephen) of Steilacoom, Wash.; niece Megan Saynisch (Michael Nesi) of Brooklyn, N.Y. and nephew Geoffrey Saynisch of Steilacoom, Wash; grandnephew Luca and grandniece Poppy Nesi of Brooklyn, N.Y.; cousins Tom Widzenas (DeeDee) of Burlington Twp., Eve Stoklosa (Les) of Tonawanda, N.Y., and TeZa Lord (Carter) of Saint Augustine, Fla; and extended family and close friends too numerous and diverse to count.

A memorial/remembrance of John's/Chicken's life and times – featuring a gallery display of his photography and memorabilia – will be held Saturday, Oct. 8.,2022 from 2-4 p.m. at Perinchief Chapels, 438 High St, Mt Holly, NJ 08060 (1-609-267-0399) with a reception to follow from 5-7 p.m. at Crescent Shrine Hall, 700 Highland Drive Westampton, NJ 08060. (<http://crescentshrine.org/contactinfodirections.html>)

His ashes will be scattered privately on the farm at a later date.

# Previous Events

## Memorial Gathering

OCT 8. 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM (ET)

Perinchief Chapels  
438 High St.  
Mount Holly, NJ 08060  
(609) 267-0399

## Reception

OCT 8. 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

Crescent Shrine Hall  
700 Highland Drive  
Westampton , NJ 08060

# Tribute Wall



“ *John Charles Chitester*

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October 29, 2022 at 11:57 AM



“ *John Charles Chitester*

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October 29, 2022 at 09:53 AM

TL

“Knowing somebody in childhood is such a privilege, a true connection to a person’s real essence. I feel very close to John Chitester because we shared so many silly childhood goings-on, even though we didn’t get to spend much time together once we reached that inferior state of existence we are called upon to duly carry out, called adulthood. John’s and my relationship was deep and real, based on the true being of a person that childhood is.

*As children, he was always Johnny. He only became John when, later in adulthood, he grew a gnarly beard (usually with chewing tobacco spilling onto it with some Jack Daniels stains). He looked more like a ZZ-Top guy than he did anybody’s little cousin Johnny. And I say “little” only because he was the youngest of our bunch of cuzzes, not so many years younger than I, but several heads smaller in stature.*

*My earliest memories of Johnny are his sweetness, his innocence. Nothing changes from when we are kids, except our bodies explode in all directions; sometimes our minds change as well, becoming either more pliable or concretized.*

*Being a kid with Johnny was like knowing an angel. Johnny was in awe of us older kids, followed us around, doing whatever he could to be included, never being a pain, never causing any trouble—just enjoying himself with the simple things of farm life, happy as a lark. And we in turn enjoyed his pleasant, never-trouble-causing company.*

*Not until Jeannie’s wedding did I see for myself that “little Johnny” was now a long-face-haired bear of a happy smiling man, who had the exact same twinkle in his eye from the little kid version I’d known so well. As the years passed, whenever I was in his company, I “saw” the little kid version of this bulky, sometimes gruff-to-others man before me.*

*Together, we laughed at getting to know each other as adults,*

*giggling in knowing each other's essence so naturally, as kids do. We never needed to talk out complicated things about life and each other, because we already knew that stuff in our bones.*

*I love you Johnny. You'll always be the sweetest blond-haired angel boy of all of us. And now you're a real angel, so don't think I won't give up getting to know you in that disguise, either.*

*Your ever-lovin kissin-cousin teZa  
teZa aka Linda*

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**teZa Lord** - September 09, 2022 at 11:16 AM



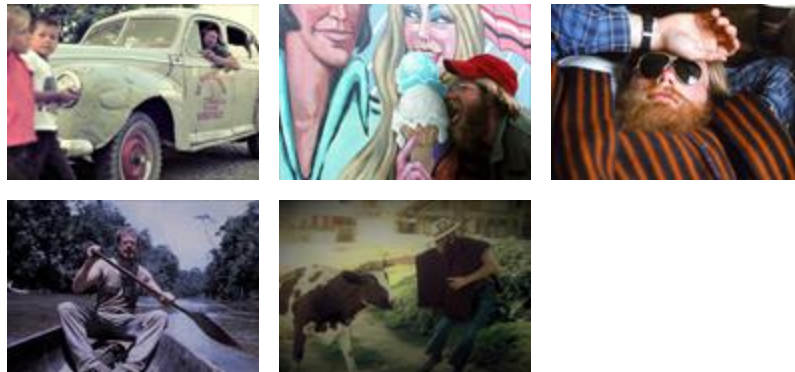
“ *Golf cart rides on the farm with Chicken are my best memories and how well he took care of his Mom.*

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**Arlene Osborne Pfeiffer** - August 27, 2022 at 07:40 PM

RB

“ *5 files added to the tribute wall*

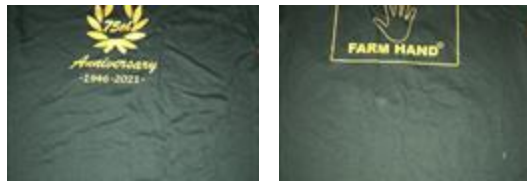


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**ralph a blessing** - August 26, 2022 at 04:40 PM

JW

“ Seems like just yesterday (actually was last September!) we were sitting at your kitchen table sharing memories of those early years as chicken farmers, our common bond, and twelve years of school together. Though you knew your days were numbered, you remained as cheerful as ever. You walked us back to your barn and gave us each a shirt celebrating the 75th anniversary of your farm. Thank you for wonderful memories. Not everyone makes the newspapers for wearing boots to graduation!! Blessings to your family,  
Tom & Judy (Luethy) Wishart



Judy Wishart - August 25, 2022 at 10:10 AM

TA

“ My heart is heavy with the news of your passing John "Chicken Man" I have such wonderful memories of you to many to list. You my friend were like another brother to me. I have every Christmas Card that you sent to my family, they always could not wait for it to arrive to see what kinda HELL Santa was raising that year. Many long conversations about your world travels while drinking an oil can of Fosters Beer. Many visits at the road stand for your delicious Produce. My thoughts and prayers are with your family and friends at this most difficult time. SHINE BRIGHT UP THERE MY FRIEND AND REST IN PARADISE! 🙏



Trudy Atkinson - August 24, 2022 at 10:14 AM

DA

“ *May you rest in peace, Chicken. My condolences to his many friends and family. I'll never forget watching him kayak in the late 80s/early 90s on Worthington's irrigation pond.*

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**Danielle K Armstrong** - August 23, 2022 at 08:06 PM

LM

*I spent many hours having fun with John. I partnered with him washing Chief Randall's car after lobbing tomatoes. Took kayaking lessons in the pool at Mercer County College, where he finally mastered the Eskimo Roll and many trips on pineland rivers. Too many great memories to write about, forever locked in my mind.*

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**Lyle Manheimer** - August 24, 2022 at 07:08 AM

RB

*I'd made tentative plans to visit John at the end of this month when my wife and I had plans to be in the area. Sadly, when I tried reaching him during the last week or so to confirm, I never got a response. Guess he's got a good excuse for not taking my call. He and I go back nearly 50 years, as we were in the same Peace Corps group in Ecuador. Our assignments were in different parts of the country but we somehow managed to find time to do some wild and crazy stuff, from canoeing in the Amazon region of Ecuador to trying to get to Panama overland one year to see the SuperBowl! I'm trying to attach a few photos of John behaving as only he knew how to do. Rest in peace, old boy.*

*Ralph Blessing  
Washington, DC*

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**ralph a blessing** - August 26, 2022 at 04:32 PM

ST

*God bless you, John! Over sixty years of friendship -- I'll miss our phone conversations over old times. When you get to heaven, say hello to Guinn, and I know you will talk about our canoe trip into the Pines and laugh about it. I still do! Your Friend Forever, Steve Croshaw*

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**Steve** - October 05, 2022 at 12:51 PM


JB

*RIP Chicken. I have very fond memories of the two of us since 1963 and working on your dads farm when we were teenagers. Even when we went on our own ways after high school we stayed in touch through out the years. The world will not be the same without you in it.  
Jim Blum (Fruit )*

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**James Blum** - October 08, 2022 at 11:48 AM

EV

*Dearly loved by ALL  
especially by me, his oldest Cuz...My heart is broken  with the  
sadness of his passing...love ya Johnny  
May you rest in peace along with ALL our other departed family  
members..xo...Eve*

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**Eve** - October 08, 2022 at 11:56 AM