



Cathy Johnston

January 30, 1965 - September 16, 2025

Cathy Johnston (née Pauley), age 60, passed away on September 16, 2025 near her cherished family cottage in Harbor Beach, Michigan. Her life was marked by a deep commitment to service, an unquenchable intellectual curiosity and a relentless enthusiasm that touched all who knew her.

Born on January 30, 1965, in Taipei, Taiwan, Cathy's early years were shaped by a childhood in East Asia, which would define her personal and professional journey. She pursued her academic passions with distinction, earning degrees from Princeton University and the University of Michigan, both in East Asian studies. She further honed her expertise through intensive Chinese language training at Middlebury College.

Cathy brought joy and energy into every facet of her life. She had an indomitable spirit that radiated through her many passions. She cherished singing in choral groups and musicals, and loved belting out show tunes with her equally passionate daughters during long car rides.

An avid athlete, Cathy embraced cycling, triathlons, and golfing with “Chicks with Sticks.” She derived energy from and embraced the Ohana spirit through long walks along the beaches near her home in Kailua, Hawaii. She delighted in discovering local festivals and farmers markets, where she often found perfect gifts for those around her—tokens that spoke volumes about how deeply she cared.

Cathy dedicated over three decades to a career in intelligence, where she became a widely recognized expert on national security and East Asia. Her work reflected not only her prodigious talents but also an unwavering commitment to mission. Colleagues admired her sharp insight, strategic mind, and tireless dedication to safeguarding national interests.

Cathy is survived by her devoted husband of 37 years, Wes Johnston; daughters Allegra Johnston-Szoo and Aria Johnston; son-in-law Adam Szoo; granddaughter Maia Johnston-Szoo; father Joseph Pauley; brother Joe Pauley; sister Cecelia Pauley; and her beloved dog, Trixie. Her mother Judith Pauley preceded her in death.

Those wishing to share memories, pictures or stories are encouraged to send them to cathy.johnston.memories@gmail.com.

Cathy's legacy lives on through the lives she touched—with her positivity, compassion, and joie de vivre. May her memory bring comfort to those who knew and loved her. A Memorial Service will be held on Saturday October 4th, 2025 from 3:00 PM to 4:30 PM at Potomac United Methodist Church 9908 S Glen Road, Potomac, MD. The service will also be live streamed. Reception to follow, location TBD. The service is expected to be well attended, please consider carpooling and arriving early.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made in Cathy's memory to the American Association of People with Disabilities at <https://www.aapd.com/donate>

Tribute Wall

JD

“ I will always remember Cathy’s creativity, brilliance, and generosity, including in singing Ave Maria—and singing it in Chinese—at my wedding.

Jennifer DeCamp - October 04, 2025 at 04:12 PM

LH

“ My heart goes out to the family. Cathy was a luminous person and will be missed.



LH - September 25, 2025 at 02:39 PM

AD

“ So sorry for your loss. My thoughts and prayers are with you at this most difficult time. With deep sadness, Anita Domingo

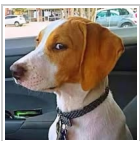
Anita Domingo - September 22, 2025 at 06:20 AM



“ I had the honor of serving on Cathy's staff for two years and appreciated her experience, willingness to innovate, energy, and openness. We accomplished a lot during her tenure because of her willingness to support change and empower and support her staff. Cathy also had a fun side which we regularly enjoyed. She had a wonderful laugh and smile; signs of her innate warmth. She also wowed us with her singing voice. Cathy was a gifted leader who helped develop a new generation of leaders. Our world was better because we knew her, and it feels somewhat diminished now that she is gone. Our challenge is to keep her spirit and memory alive.

Bobby K.

Robert Kitrinis - September 21, 2025 at 08:38 PM



“ I served as one of Cathy's deputies for two years and appreciated her experience, willingness to innovate, energy, and openness. We accomplished a lot during her tenure because of the above and her willingness to empower and support her staff. Cathy also had a fun side which we enjoyed on a regular basis. She had a wonderful laugh and smile; signs of her innate warmth. She also wowed us with her singing voice. She was a gifted person who shared her talents with those around her. Our world was better because we knew her and it feels somewhat diminished now that she is gone. Our challenge is to keep her spirit and memory alive.

Bobby K.

Robert Kitrinis - September 21, 2025 at 07:57 PM

AN

“ I’ve had the joy of watching Cathy’s fur baby Trixie and prior Rama for the past two years. Every day that my daughter and I picked up trixie or dropped her off Cathy would always shine her light onto us. She was very clearly dedicated to her work, her church, trixie, her health, her children and grandchildren, and her husband Wes. She always managed to put a smile on not only my face but my 4 year old daughters as well. Instead of a hi & bye she would take the time to talk to us, share upcoming events in Reston that my daughter would enjoy, make my daughter smile.. She would pass along things to my daughter that created a sparkle in my daughter’s eye and a smile in my heart. Jewelry, Easter candy, little songs.. My heart goes out to her family as even I find so much sadness in this news. She represented her faith so well and inspired me with her strong energy, her passion, and her patience. She has made a strong impact on me and my family. We love you Cathy. Psalm 34:18 “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit”.

Antoinette - September 21, 2025 at 07:22 PM

JG

“ When I first met Cathy in 2012, I was sent to accompany her whenever she visited technologists at other agencies. Why? Cathy could see where these technologies could enable DIA analysts, while I had to quietly temper her visions without killing them. Such a great person and thought leader; she always understood and always asked how we could get there. I’ll miss her.

Jack Gumtow - September 21, 2025 at 03:53 PM

MA

“ Cathy was so generous with her colleagues in sharing knowledge without making it feel as if she was teaching—I learned so much from her intellectually and organizationally. She has left a lasting legacy in our community and will long be missed.

MaryM - September 21, 2025 at 02:47 PM

BA

“ I remember visiting Cathy in Hawaii when she was the Deputy J2 and seeing all the family pictures behind her desk, asking about them, and with a huge smile she took me through the stories of the photos and the kids. Such a great lady and mom.

Bob Ashley - September 21, 2025 at 09:49 AM

RR

Cathy was a National Treasure. Inspirational, thoughtful and insightful.

Rick Riccardelli - September 22, 2025 at 04:11 AM

RR

Cathy was a National Treasure. Inspirational, thoughtful and insightful.

Rick Riccardelli - September 22, 2025 at 04:31 AM

LJ

As Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, I had the opportunity and honor to promote Cathy to the Civil Service Senior Ranks. It was a true testament to her leadership qualities and professional expertise, since those making the recommendation were themselves "seniors" at the Agency and most "seniors" had decades of service in their particular fields. Cathy was in her 30's. She broke the mold. And her promotion ceremony was most memorable as it was attended by her family, to include her rambunctious children. It was a joy. My decades of association with Cathy only added to the joy and confirmed that she was a remarkable professional and the most wonderful person.

Lowell (Jake) Jacoby, Vice Admiral, US Navy (Retired)

Lowell Jacoby - September 22, 2025 at 09:07 AM

DH

It is with deep respect and gratitude that I remember Cathy, a leader whose presence was both powerful and uplifting. I had the distinct honor of serving as her Executive Assistant, a role that allowed me to witness firsthand the remarkable qualities that made Cathy not just a leader, but a true inspiration.

Cathy was a force someone who expected nothing less than perfection from herself and her team yet always led with compassion and an unwavering commitment to excellence. Working alongside her, I took pride in the small victories: from making sure she arrived at her meetings on time to supporting her in her constant pursuit of progress. Her passion for the mission was contagious, and her drive pushed all of us to be better versions of ourselves.

One of the greatest honors of my career was accompanying Cathy when she received the Presidential Rank Award at the Pentagon. It was a moment that spoke volumes about her dedication, the respect she earned, and the incredible impact she had on the agency and beyond. Yet, despite the accolades and the recognition, Cathy remained humble, always focused on what more could be done and how we could all improve.

She was a person full of life, always pushing the boundaries of what was possible, and inspiring everyone around her to do the same. Her energy, intelligence, and determination were contagious, and her legacy will live on in the countless individuals whose lives she touched.

To Wes, the girls, and her extended family, my deepest condolences go out to you. Cathy's loss is immeasurable, but her spirit, her lessons, and the countless memories will continue to inspire and guide us. Cathy, you were a mentor, a leader, and a friend. The world is better for having had you in it, and I am forever grateful for the time I spent alongside you. I will miss you.

Doris Holder

Doris Holder - September 22, 2025 at 03:06 PM

KT

I was lucky to have known Cathy professionally as she was beginning her career. She was so smart, positive and always smiling. She was truly a wonderful leader and colleague. My condolences to Cathy's family.

Kathleen Turner

Kathleen Turner - September 23, 2025 at 04:28 PM