

## The Remarkable Life of Wilson Wright

On Nov. 5, 1912, Woodrow Wilson was elected President of the United States. My mother, Wilson Madoline Hudson Wright, was born that day, at home, in Girdletree, MD. Yes, there is a town called Girdletree! My grandfather had a sense of humor and was a staunch Democrat, so he named my mother Wilson. She was the fourth and last child of Moses James Hudson and Madoline Watson Hudson. They were 41 years old when Wilson was born. Her oldest sister, Mildred, was 18 years old, married, and had a baby when my mother was born, making Wilson a "pre-natal" aunt.

Girdletree, MD, is about 30 miles south of Ocean City, MD, and 6 miles south of Snow Hill, MD, not far from the Virginia line. This small town on the eastern shore had a population of maybe 150 people at that time, and not many more now! Moses Hudson owned and ran the general store, later selling it to go into farming. He was prosperous; he bought and managed three farms in the Girdletree area. When eastern shore businessmen started to develop the resort area at Ocean City, he was asked to join in the project, but turned it down. He believed it would never be profitable, since one could only reach the shore by taking a ferry boat over the Chesapeake Bay. Moses was not a visionary.

Wilson was the only one of the four children to go to college. In those days, the MD eastern shore school system only offered 11 years of schooling, the high school years requiring Girdletree youth to travel by bus to Snowhill to finish the program. There, Wilson graduated from the eleventh grade in 1928, at the tender age of 16. Moses and Madoline enrolled her at Hood College in Frederick MD, where she graduated in 1933. She was voted "White Blazer Girl" by her classmates, the award for the most athletic classmate. She played softball, field hockey, and threw the javelin. She called herself a tomboy, and adored her brother, Preston, eight years her senior.

After college, Wilson began a career in social work in the Baltimore area. She met, dated, and married William John Wright, a recent graduate of the Methodist Seminary at Western Maryland College, now called McDaniels. She and Bill had three children, I being the oldest, born just a few minutes before my twin sister, Jane, in January, 1941. Eleven months later, on Dec. 6, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. My brother, Bill Wright, of Hagerstown was born in May, 1945, placing him in the first wave of baby boomers. In 1949, our father, the Methodist Minister in Bel Air, MD, fell in love with one of the married women in his congregation, and they eloped to Reno, Nevada. You can imagine the scandal that would ensue if that happened in this church today. Think what it did to that church, that town, and the families involved back in 1949! Mom was devastated.

She was a minister's wife in the Methodist Church. She had no money, no job, no home (when one minister left, a new one came, and moved into the home). But Wilson did have three young children, and some of Bill's debts to pay. And she did have a remarkable faith, and gained strength from her faith.

She had few options, but rejected immediately the offer to come home to Girdletree. She wanted us children to have more stimulating opportunities than Girdletree could provide. Her in-laws lived in Hagerstown, Reverend William Francis Wright and his wife, Lillian. This Rev. Wright was the District Superintendent. Wilson moved us in with them, and we loved it! We joined this church and graduated from these schools.

Wilson earned her teacher's certificate and began teaching at Antietam Elementary School, third grade. When the school closed, she transferred, with the other Antietam teachers and students, to Bester School. She taught there until retirement in 1974. She had not had an easy life. Her first year of teaching in Washington Co. paid \$2400. When the Rev. Wright's term as D.S. was over, about a year after we moved in, my grandparents moved back to Baltimore, and Wilson rented a place on Wayside Ave, very close to Broadway School, where we twins were students. Not long after that she bought a little house on Belview Ave., about the time Jane and I started Junior High School at Woodland Way. Brother Bill went to Antietam School with my mother. None of these steps to independence came easily. Wilson faced no small amount of hostility as a single mother in the 50's. It was difficult for her to get a loan, to buy the house, a car, even to be accepted by the neighbors. One neighbor actually asked her, "Where is your man, anyway?" But she accomplished all these things, and earned a reputation as a fine, upright, outstanding member of the community. She met the challenges, conquered the skeptics, made friends of the enemies, and prevailed.

When we were fifteen, my twin sister, Jane, had a diving accident at a public landing on the eastern shore. She broke her neck, injuring her spinal cord. That was that. Jane never walked independently again. JWUMC and all the conference churches were very supportive of our family during this setback, too. For many months we went to school during the week and traveled every weekend, first to Salisbury, MD, then to Children's Hospital in Baltimore, to visit Jane. Finally, Jane was home, in a wheelchair, a paraplegic. I carried an intercom system to my high school classes, so Jane could "attend" and graduate with me. We were in the final graduating class from the old Hagerstown High School, the class of 1958. Jane also had some surgeries, and extensive physical therapy sessions, to prepare her to follow me to Hood College. I graduated in 1962, Jane in 1963. We both had full scholarships, and both married and became teachers. Brother Bill graduated from Towson and also had a teaching and later an administrative career in education. Jane never could have children, but Billy and I gave Wilson four grandchildren to spoil!

Wilson loved retirement, just as she had loved teaching. She became even more involved with JWUMC and other organizations, and had many hobbies. She gardened, visited us children, traveled in Europe, and baked cookies for her "shut-ins," older folks confined in nursing homes. She was at peace, secure in her faith. She said to me, "I may be alone, but I'm never lonely."

On December 18, 1986, Wilson suffered a massive cerebral hemorrhage and died. My cousin, Linda Wright Donovan told me Wilson was the sweetest, kindest, nicest woman she had ever known. The same can be said for Linda's mother, JWUMC's own Nettie Wright, widow of the late Rev. Harold B. Wright, my uncle. They are (were) members of JWUMC.

Wilson Wright led by example. She was a master teacher. She did not become rich or famous, but she could pluck a chicken, butcher a cow, recognize our local bird songs, and hit a home run. She grew and arranged beautiful flowers, baked scrumptious pies, and touched many lives. She would be honored knowing your circle is named after her.

Betty Wright