



Willie Gray Harris Martin

By WILLA GRAY MARTIN PIERCE

AFTERWARDS, I grieved to think of the many years that college and career took me away from home and Mother.

In bitter-sweet consolation, I pictured her blithe and happy, a young woman sitting on a porch banister at "Greystone." Such a joyful moment in her college years was captured in a photograph which I have long remembered. Her large brown eyes looked directly and smilingly into the camera as she leaned against a banister post, bell-like sleeves with eyelet embroidery flaring out coquettishly. Her cool, dainty dress was ankle-length and the plain gold bracelet she wore on her left wrist was to survive the teething of four children. Wearing her shiny, thick chestnut-colored hair in an Edwardian, bouffant style, slim-waisted and medium-height, Willie Gray—if not the family beauty—was certainly in the running with her beloved four sisters. How poignant to think of her, radiant with youth and innocence on that summer afternoon long ago! Since childhood, she had been her dear Papa's pal, and was proud to have survived the many tree falls to become a thoroughly feminine young woman.

Other photographs of this period show her gently smiling, often looking downward, perhaps to avoid the glare of the sun, yet basking in a glow of happy, private thoughts. She appeared to be the epitome of Charles Dana Gibson's "eternal female"; her classmates at Winthrop College must have agreed, for they voted her the "Gibson Girl of the Year" when she graduated.

In the big, comfortable living room at Greystone, sometimes there was talk of the devastation by the weather for farming, and boll weevils in cotton. These discussions about modern scientific farming stimulated her inquiring mind, but Willie learned well the rigors of life when nature always seemed to win. Her appreciation of the joys of growing up in a family with eight brothers and sisters

Demure Willie Gray Harris, Winthrop College student, was photographed in this pose by Hemphill of Rock Hill—a picture made especially for her first beau, who became her husband. The young woman, who was also a Winthrop beauty queen, afterwards was a distinguished civic leader of Greenville.

was whole-hearted; she enjoyed windmills and treadmills, her mother's rose garden, and parties with the trees garlanded with jack-o-lanterns. On the tennis courts, her blonde younger sister, Louise, was often her most aggressive opponent. Through acres of cotton she rode in the early fall with "Papa" in his buggy to give water to the pickers.

The smiling girl, pictured on the porch, had ahead of her days demanding self-discipline and courage: she was to learn she had inherited a tendency toward headaches; she was to teach in a primitive country school where there was no indoor plumbing. There were to be inevitable beaux—some awkward, some vain, some handsome—and one Willie rejected so "unworthy" in the eyes of her oldest sister, Madge, that she begged her not to marry him, promising her \$5 if she should comply.

Willie Gray Harris had been out of college four years when one snowy day, two days before Christmas in 1908, she became the wife of a tall, blue-eyed, dark-haired, Furman University professor who had received his Master of Arts degree from Cornell University in Latin and Greek. Eight years her senior, Columbus Benjamin Martin had first seen his bride-to-be when, as a child, he had gone with his mother to visit her—their neighbor's new baby.

They were married in her parents' Victorian parlor, and drove off by carriage to board a train for Florida.

The young teacher, self-confident, yet sensitive and ardent, wanted more than any thing in the world to make his demure bride proud of him. They built near the college campus a comfortable, plain house of early 20th-century style, with large rooms and high ceilings and nice cool porches. Her husband deciding on a color of stain for the dining room wainscoting while she was visiting at home, wrote her please not to tell him if she did not like it; he could not bear her being disappointed.

At our house on spring and summer nights we would sit talking on the porch while shadows of the wisteria vines pictured swaying silhouettes on the clapboards. Fireflies, like small satellites, made us the center of a cozy world. Sometimes, Mother might play Liszt's "Forest Murmurs" or "Annie Laurie." If the soft night air and quiet talk filled her with sentiment, she would play "Love's Dream After the Ball."

The things that one remembers best are not necessarily the most important; things have become important simply because one happens to remember them.

My father left teaching for a business career, and life accelerated when we moved into a handsome new house, a Georgian colonial, which was to become the scene for much fine southern living. Mother then seemed to be on every committee in town, and Dad inevitably became impatient with the endless telephoning. He thought it so unlike her to be so pre-occupied with endless ladies' clubs, luncheons and teas.

It was unlike her. With the smallest hint from him, she was apologizing for feeding him left-over sandwiches. So gentle and non-assertive was her nature that one of the few times she ever "fussed" at him was over an insignificant incident, but it left an immortal impression. For Saturday lunch, she had baked a cheese soufflé, and when it was ready, called him from his beautiful garden but when he arrived too late, it had fallen. She said something, probably underscoring her lack of enthusiasm for making another soufflé. Her irritation so impressed him that months later when I arrived home for a holiday, he mentioned the incident several times. He could not believe she would reprimand him.

It is not as an efficient little lady packing her bags for such occasions as the annual meeting of the General Federation of Women's Clubs or a White House Conference that we remember her—Louisa, Peter, Pat, and I. It was his or her individual crisis, or special experience in which she played such a vital role, we cherish. Her second daughter, Louisa, was to become most like her in temperament.

Among the memories swirling through my mind was a trip to Europe with Mother and Pat, my younger sister. Unforgettable was Mother's quiet, persistent student-like interest in history, a subject often neglected today with tragic consequences.

I remember the annual family reunions, the large family dinners with her sisters and brothers, cozy talks with the two of us in her room, with endless books spread across her bed. There are visions of her descending the stairs and my father waiting below, his proud face wreathed in smiles. I can still feel her small, increasingly delicate arms flung around me in greeting upon my arrival from faraway places. No matter what experience comes floating back,

there is always about her memory a pervading air of nobility, suggesting the depths of a mind that words fail to capture.

Willie Gray Harris Martin was born near Gray Court January 1, 1884, the third daughter of Lucinda Gray and William Pinckney Harris. In the family there were nine children: Madge, Richard, Daisy, Willie, Robert, Louise, Gray, Teague and Janie.

Willie's father, who operated a large-scale plantation, was the second person to win a citation from Clemson College for Scientific Farming. Her mother was a graduate of Williamston, now Lander College. Columbus Benjamin Martin, the educator whom she married, later entered business as a real estate and insurance executive in Greenville, and became a distinguished civic and cultural leader there.

Mrs. Martin served as president of the Greenville Thursday Club and the Crescent Literary Club, and was active in organizing the Piedmont Historical Society. She began a sewing group as a member of the Nathaniel Greene Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution of Donaldson Air Base and was chairman of the residential division of the Red Cross. By arranging for clubs and other organizations in Greenville to sponsor evening classes for adults, she assisted Dr. Wil Lou Gray in her campaign against illiteracy and helped to establish a scholarship fund for the South Carolina Opportunity School.

Probably Mrs. Martin's most dramatic achievement in civic work occurred while she was the president of the Woman's Bureau of the Greenville Chamber of Commerce, when the bureau won second place in a National Homes contest one year and the next year, first place.

President Hoover invited Mrs. Martin to serve as a member of the national committee on Business and Housing, and she subsequently attended a White House Conference in Washington. A letter to her, dated August 13, 1931, outlined the objectives of the president and his secretary of commerce, R. P. Lamont.

The committee studied the problems of various municipal authorities in promoting home ownership and financing, city planning, zoning, park development, and civic beautification.

The connecting threads between volunteer civic work of 40 years ago and the work being done today are clearly visible. It is to be hoped that the efforts of Willie Gray Harris Martin, a modest,

dedicated citizen (as well as the efforts of other women included in this book) may have helped to make our present problems less desperate.



WILLA GRAY MARTIN PIERCE

Willa Gray Martin Pierce graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting from Yale University in 1936, and has had one-man shows in New Haven, Greenville, Rye, Antigua, West Indies, and Nantucket.

She married Marvin Pierce of Dayton, Ohio, in June 1952. Mr. Pierce was president of the McCall Corporation, the largest printer of magazines in the United States, and publisher of *McCall's* and other magazines. A well-known, amateur sportsman, he represented the United States as a member of the U. S. Seniors' Golf Association in matches against Great Britain and Canada in 1960.

Mrs. Pierce has four step-children: Mrs. Walter Rafferty (Martha) of West Hartford, Connecticut; James Pierce, advertising manager for *Outdoor Life*; and Mrs. George Bush (Barbara), whose husband formerly was a member of the Congress, and is now ambassador to the United Nations.

Willa Pierce is a member of the American Yacht Club in Rye, and is active in the Rye Garden Club, which is affiliated with the Garden Clubs of America. Several years ago she represented her club at an annual meeting in Hawaii.

Mrs. Pierce served several terms on the board of the Rye Library; is on its art committee; and writes art reviews for Westchester papers in behalf of the library's art gallery.

Since her husband's death in 1969, she has been active in painting and exhibiting. Her studio is in Rye, New York.

Bush's South Carolina roots revealed

By William H. Hunter

Dr. Joel Wyman of Anderson and his charming wife, Kathryn, came by the other day to bring a vase of flowers following the death of my wife's mother. Now, as you all know, at funeral times in South Carolina at least half of the conversation is about family roots.

Joel's wife is Kathryn Bush from a farm just below the fall line in the Aiken-Barnwell axis. She was a Phi Beta Kappa from the University of South Carolina, and her mind is still like a steel trap.

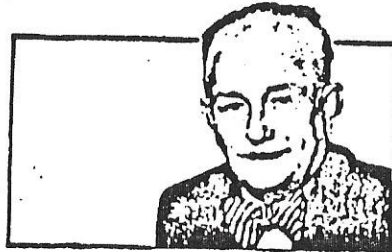
She cocked her pretty head at me and said, "Bill, I do hope you are out working for George Bush." I had never heard Kathryn bring up politics for all the years I had known her, so I said, "George Bush, why Kathryn, when did you get involved with politics?"

She folded her gloves while giving me a measured look and replied, "George Herbert Walker Bush is for all intents and purposes a South Carolinian and so is his wife."

I leaned forward with my mouth hanging open a bit and said, "Whatever happened to Texas, Massachusetts, Maine, and Connecticut? I thought they were all claiming Bush."

Flipping her fingers, she responded, "Well, that is their prerogative, but we in South Carolina have the best claim on the Bush family. Besides, Texas was settled mostly by South Carolinians. The vice-president was named for his grandfather, George Herbert Walker. Mr. Walker had a farm in Barnwell County where he spent much of his time with his favorite grandson, young George Bush.

Trying to needle my friend a bit, I said, "Now, Kathryn, the next thing



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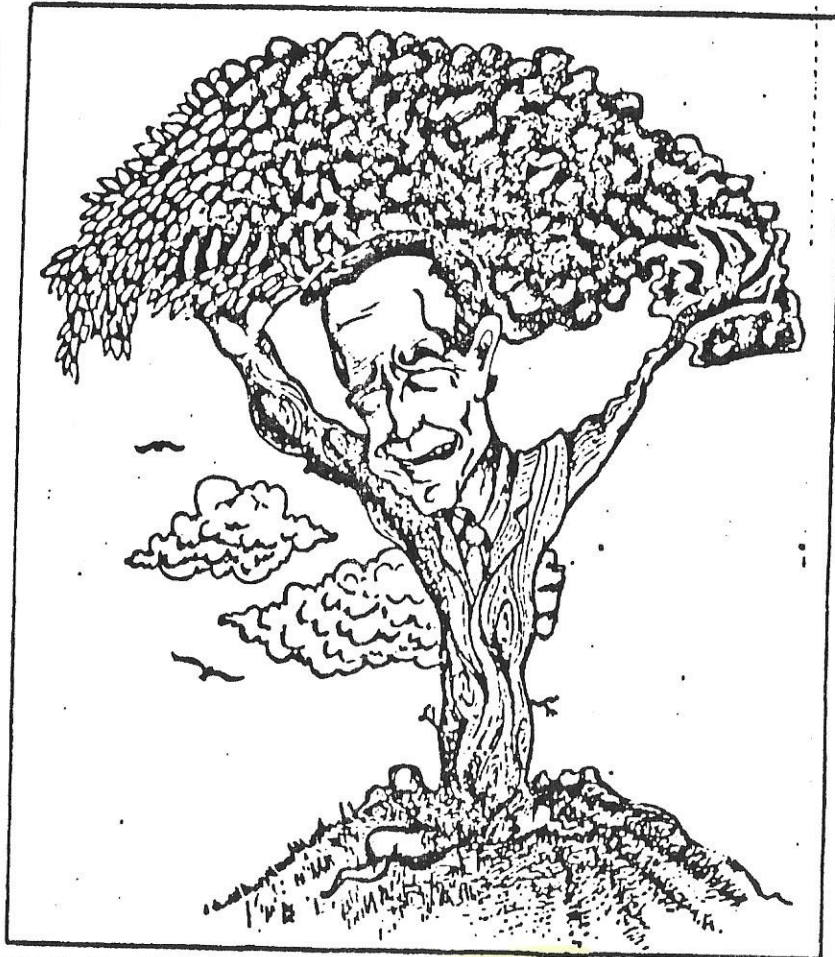
She laughed and said, "Well, hardly that. But don't talk to me about the 'Barnwell Ring,' there are few people who did more for South Carolina than Edgar Brown and Sol Blatt."

I couldn't argue with her on that, so she went on, "And that precious Barbara Bush, she and George were teenage sweethearts. Barbara went to school at St. Angela Academy in Aiken. She finished at Ashley Hall in Charleston."

She had my complete attention by this time and I asked, "Was George dating Barbara while she was in school in South Carolina?"

"Well," she answered, "I would imagine so, George was always real smart, he wouldn't have let someone like Barbara get away from him. You know they married real young. Barbara's father was editor and publisher of McCall's Magazine. He was widowed young, and his second wife was Willa Gray Martin of Greenville, daughter of C.B. Martin. Willa Gray was named after her aunt Wil Lou Gray, who is one of the most famous South Carolina women who ever lived."

Taking a deep breath, I said, "Wow, Kathryn, does this translate into eight



South Carolina electoral votes in November?"

She said, "Well, I should hope so. If there's one thing South Carolina does, it is to look after her own. And, Bill, you do know that Prescott Bush, who married George Walker's daughter Nancy — their second son being George Bush — is a direct descendant of Samuel Prescott, who was a Revolutionary War hero from South Carolina?"

In fact, she told me, Prescott Bush was married in Barnwell County and founded several churches in South Carolina before accepting a grant of land in Stewart County, Ga. and moving there.

I looked in amazement at the Gamecock Phi Beta Kappa, "Uh, Kathryn," I finally managed. "How many electoral votes does Georgia have?"

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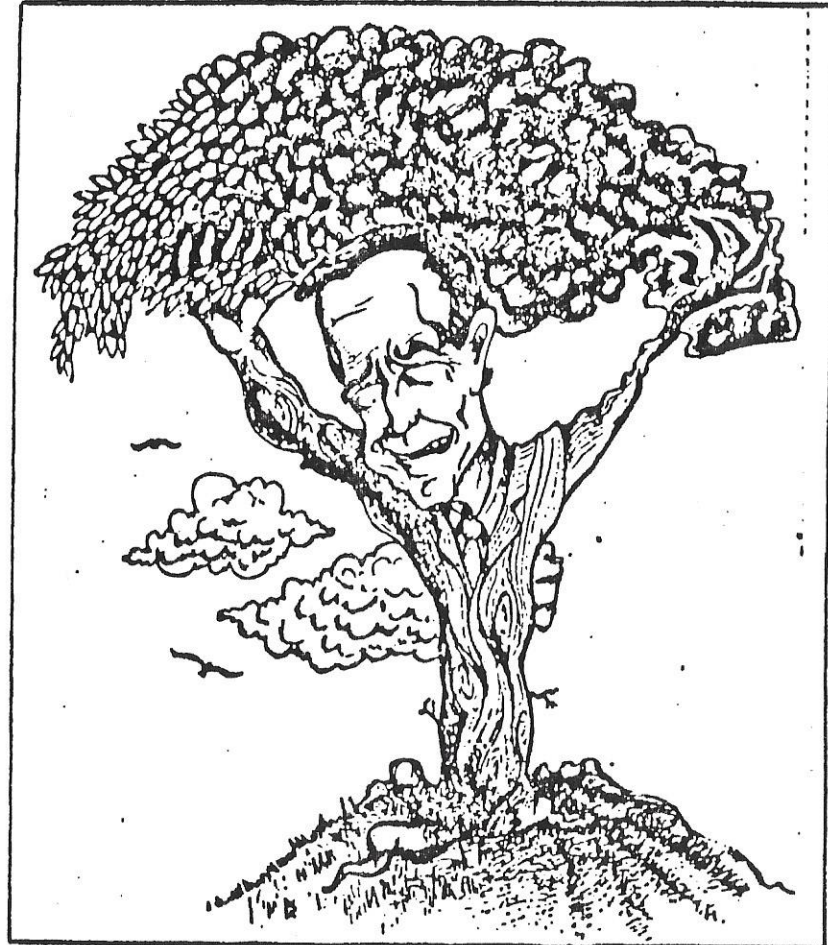
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