

Herland

VOICE

September, 1999

JUSTICE ALMA WILSON

by Nancy J. Nesser

Oklahoma Supreme Court Justice Alma Wilson died July 27 after a brief illness. Justice Wilson lived her life as a true pioneer, a working mother, and a devoted child advocate. With no real role models to look to, she forged a career in law second to none. After spending several years in private practice and serving as a judge on many levels, she was appointed to the Oklahoma Supreme Court in 1982 by Gov. George Nigh. Justice Wilson was retained by a vote of the people many times during her 17 years with the Supreme Court.

While I was a law student, I had the good fortune to meet Justice Wilson through her daughter Lee Anne. I was both amazed and amused by her very personable style. Although she had the sharpest legal mind, she had no idea how to program her VCR so that she could tape the tennis matches she loved to watch. During a visit to her home in Pauls Valley, I got to be her hero for a little while because I could program the VCR and talk about the law.

Chief Justice Wilson presided over the swearing in ceremony that officially marked the beginning of my law career and that of Oklahoma City attorney Peggy Johnson. It was truly a banner year for women lawyers as we were sworn in by the first female Chief Justice of the Oklahoma Supreme Court; Justice Yvonne Kauger was the first female Vice-Chief Justice, and we were welcomed to the Oklahoma Bar Association by their first female president, Mona Lambaird.

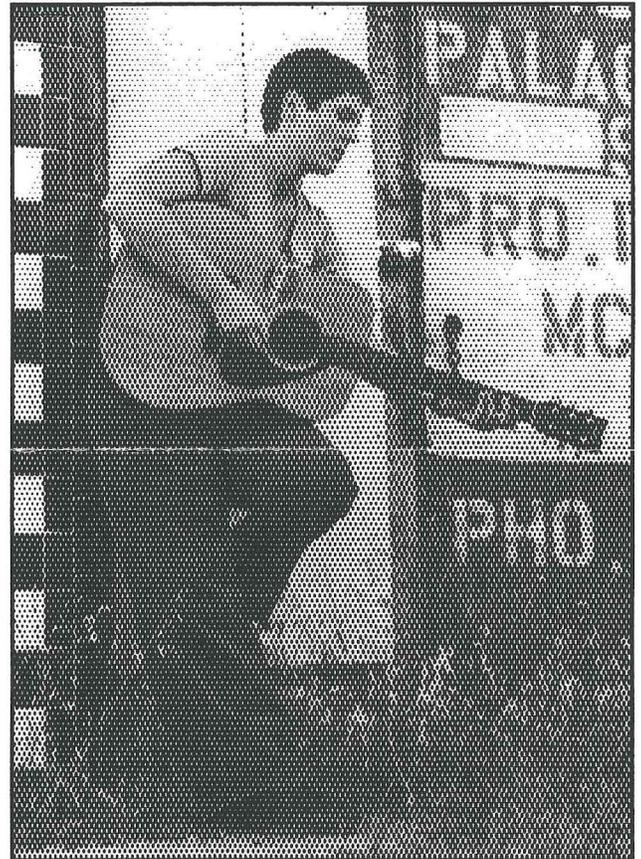
After the official ceremony was over, Justice Wilson welcomed me and my family into her office for a little pep talk about the practice of law. I admit that I do not remember exactly what she said to me that day, but she wanted to encourage me to put all I had into my practice, mentally and emotionally, and to warn me that it would sometimes be "hell on wheels", but that the rewards would be greater than the trouble.

Alma Wilson has been a devoted advocate for children. One example is the opinion she authored for the Court in the *Fox v. Fox* case. Justice Wilson made it clear that lesbian mothers are not unfit merely because of their sexual orientation. Her strongly worded opinion has opened the door for mothers who would otherwise be forced to give up their children or face an ugly court battle. The *Fox* case is a landmark, not just in Oklahoma, but in the nation, setting a clear legal standard.

In 1998, she fulfilled a lifelong dream when she and others founded the Seeworth Preparatory Academy, an alternative school in Oklahoma City. Her devotion to the future of the children of Oklahoma was nowhere more obvious than in her dedication to starting this school. She believed that all children have the potential for greatness, they just need some encouragement

and attention in order for it to manifest. The name of the school is very appropriate, because she could see worth in all children, and most adults.

I, like all of those who met her, will never forget her spirit, her love of the law or her devotion to her daughter. She is without question a hero for all time. □



See Marca Cassity in concert

at the

Herland Fall Retreat

October 1-3

Lake Murray State Park

Marca will also lead a guitar workshop

...a fierce energy, crazy sense of humor and self-confidence that's irresistible... - Doug Hill, Norman Transcript

ST. SYBIL

Sybil Ludington, Matron Saint of the forgotten woman, is an occasional contributor in this space.

Dear St. Sybil,

I need some advice, please. I am inundated daily with emails and letters advising me of terrible things that Congress is getting ready to do; and which I am supposed to nip in the bud by contacting my Senators and Congressmen.

Now Sybil, you know as well as I that calling Jim Inhofe and asking him to vote against the Defense of Marriage Bill or for the Employment Non-Discriminatory Act, or for maintaining affirmative action or upholding reproductive freedom, is money and time out the window; and of course it's not just Inhofe, it's all of them - every single member of the Oklahoma delegation is a lost cause, completely unreachable by appeals to reason or decency.

I guess I could, at some great expense, call Paul Wellstone or Ted Kennedy or Barbara Mikulski or that nice socialist from Maine, (Vermont? New Hampshire?) and ask them to vote the way I want them to - but what good would that do? That's how they'd vote anyway.

So what I do now when I get these passionate and well-intentioned pleas to try to affect the process is, I feel just awful - frustrated and useless and totally deprived of decent representation - for a few minutes; then I hit the old delete button or toss the letter in the circular file, and add another permanent layer to my onionskin of guilt and unempowerment.

Help me please, Sybil, to become empowered, influence the process, and lose some of this guilt along the way.

My heartfelt thanks in advance,

Yours,

Hope Lhess

Dear Hope:

True, you do appear to be in a quandary, and it does seem hopeless trying to change the mindset of a gaggle of buffoons; but try to think of it not as an impossible task but just a really *really* big challenge.

First of all, remember that you are not alone, and that a large number of Oklahomans are decent people and they will, over time, from time to time, communicate their views to their elected representatives also. Your reps are hearing from other folk besides you, and it as true as it is trite that your one letter or call might be just the one to put it over the top and change the way they vote on some issues.

Secondly: Politicians are not immune from having an awakening or raising of consciousness through personal experience. This has actually happened in a small way to Rep. Steve Largent, so intractably to the right of Attila the Hun in most respects. Steve's experience in football opened him to a respect for African Americans, and African Americans on his staff have led him to an understanding that affirmative action, at least based on race, is not all bad. His mind opened a leetle tiny bit on that one. It's not much, but it is progress; a step in the proper direction.

Now, Hope, I know you are going to bring up Newt Gingrich, and how he didn't gain any understanding or empathy from having a lesbian sister; but that's not fair, Gingrich is not your ordinary right-wing newt - uh - nut; and bad as they are, the Oklahoma delegation, with the exception perhaps of Inhofe and Watts, are not as fundamentally vicious and meanspirited and amoral as was your Speaker Newt. Well all right, maybe they are, but Largent has proven that they are not all beyond some growth and learning.

And that being the case, my dear, I have to tell you what you already know and don't want to hear: it *is* your duty to call and write them and share your views with them; to push that boulder up the slope and watch it roll down again and again, just on the tiniest chance that your effort will change them. And while you are at it, don't forget to write those letters to the editor, where you have a chance to influence the thinking of voters; and who knows where that might lead?

Yours with fond memories of riding my Star throughout the long dangerous night those many years ago, and sympathy that your call to duty lacks the glamour and exhilaration of mine. Still, duty is duty. I know you'll do yours.

Fondly,

Sybil

PS: That would be Representative Bernie Sanders of Vermont, elected officially as an Independent, and you're quite right, he's a socialist.

Dear Saint Syb,

Are you going to the Retreat at the end of the month?

xoxo,

Jess Wondrin,

Dear Jess,

Well yes. Where else could I spend a weekend doing exactly what I want to do in the beautiful Oklahoma fall, being as gregarious or reclusive as I feel like at any given moment, catching up on my reading and flirting and cardplaying and fishing and softball, all the while surrounded by the neatest women on your space and time continuum.

And it's the last Herland Retreat of the Millennium - hmmm. Could this portend miraculous and marvelous manifestations of madness and mirth emanating from old Lake Murray at Midnight on October 1? Ohh yes, I'll be there!

xoxo yourself,

Syb

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presents

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REYNOLDS**

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6:30 p.m.

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	over \$30,000	\$60	over \$50,000

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