

## THE WRIGHTS' TIME TO FLY:

### THE FAMILY REMEMBERS

**MS. SHARKEY:** Hello, I'm Mary Lou Sharkey, and we're here today to talk to that special Wright family, direct descendants of our famous Wright brothers, the aviation pioneers who were born right here in Dayton, and we'd like to have the family tell in their own words a little bit about those wonderful memories we have of the Wrights. We've found that the Wrights were such great experimenters and chroniclers of all their experiments, and great photographers too, so we have a lot of great facts about them, but we know so little about their personality and their closeness and all the strife and work and fun that went into their momentous experiments.

With us today are Ivonette Wright Miller and her husband, Harold Miller, and Horace Wright and his wife, Sue Wright. And we'd like to ask them a few questions. In fact, Ivonette, if you don't mind, I'll start with you. Tell us a little bit about the closeness of those brothers. They seemed to be almost of one mind.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** That's true, they were. As children they shared their toys.

**MS. SHARKEY:** I understand that they had their interest in first flight when their father brought them a toy?

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**MRS. Wright Miller:** Yes. Yes, it was a helicopter-type of thing, and he . . . Their father was Bishop Wright, and in his travels around the churches he visited he found this toy and brought it home to them. They were all interested in it. They called it "the flying bat." (chuckling) It was one of those things that was propelled by rubber bands.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Really?

**MRS. Wright Miller:** That was the start of their interest in flying, I think. That was at the base of it.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Now, they also did a lot of reading about Otto Lilienthal, the German glider expert. Can you tell me a little bit about how that . . . ?

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Well, they thought that his ideas were better than anybody else's. They felt that he had more of what it takes to fly than any of the rest of them, but he missed it too, in some ways. But he had more good information than any of the rest of them.

**MR. MILLER:** If I might interrupt and say that when they found out Lilienthal had got high enough in the air to fly . . . his plane

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collapsed and he killed himself, why, they thought that he had proved something: He'd at least got high enough off the ground to kill himself.

**MS. SHARKEY:** That's one way of looking at it, isn't it? Horace, their personalities were different, even though they were very close.

**MR. WRIGHT:** Yes, they were different, but I think both of them enjoyed a challenge of another mind and a mind that could really put some pressure on their thinking. (chuckling) And I think that when they would argue and then after awhile they'd get quiet and one of them would go off and try to prove his point and figure a way that he could prove it.

**MS. SHARKEY:** So their brilliant minds kept egging the other on.

**MR. WRIGHT:** But I think both of them helped develop the other's mind.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Yes.

**MR. WRIGHT:** Wilbur was more, I'd say, practical. Orville was more of a dreamer, I think. But I've always thought that one of

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Orville's main abilities was thinking in three dimensions. And in thinking in three dimensions, that means flying. And he could feel when he was up in the air what to do and different . . . And if you try to figure it yourself, it's baffling. But he, I think, could think in what I call three dimensions.

**MS. SHARKEY:** That's very interesting. I believe that. I believe that. Uncle Orville had a pretty good sense of humor, as well, I understand.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Oh yes, and he was a prankster.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Was he a prankster?

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Very much so. Perhaps you want me to tell a story?

**MS. SHARKEY:** I'd like you to.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** We were there for dinner the first Christmas after we were married, the first time my husband was there for the Christmas dinner. For our Christmas each year, Uncle Orv gave us . . . put on the table an envelope with our name on each one of them, printed by himself—he was a very good printer—and a freshly

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minted twenty-dollar bill inside. Well, after everybody had opened their envelope and taken out the money, I looked around and my husband, who was a new member of the family, had a box of candy. And that gave us the idea, well, Uncle Orv was playing the prank on him this time. So they said, "Scribze, open it up. I bet yours is inside someplace." Well, he was very embarrassed and he said he was satisfied with a box of candy and he didn't want to look any further, but he looked into the box of candy and took out every piece of candy. There was nothing there. So, after awhile they said, "There certainly must be something in there. Take out. Look again. Maybe if you take the piece of paper, the paper that is on it, take that off." And so he took each . . . took the paper all off of the box of candy. And in under the top of it where there was sort of a plushy thing on top, there was his envelope with his name on it and the money inside.

**MS. SHARKEY:** He had to search for it, didn't he? (chuckling)

**MRS. Wright Miller:** And Uncle Orv was . . . his eyes were just dancing! He had been successful in putting across one of his ideas, and he was delighted. Scribze was embarrassed to death.

**MS. SHARKEY:** (chuckling) I understand that they used to actually entertain the youngsters in the family, too.

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**MR. WRIGHT:** Well, of course, they had an awful lot of books and that, and I can remember while they were still on Hawthorn Street they got what they called the *Children's Encyclopedia*. And every month that would come with a trick in it, some kind of a gimcrack, things that would startle you, like you judge which is the tallest, and there'd be angles making one look taller than the other when it wasn't. And they got that for two years, I can remember, and later that became the *Children's Encyclopedia*. And this was all taken from those books condensed.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Wow!

**MR. WRIGHT:** Reading was one of them. Of course, making candy was one. (chuckling)

**MS. SHARKEY:** Making candy? That's interesting. Was it good?

**MR. WRIGHT:** Yeah. It was hard. I think they started out making fudge, but it went too fast, (chuckling) so they put out three kinds of candy: chocolate, butterscotch, or caramel. Now, of course, the caramel was just taken to a temperature that it burnt. And they'd rotate them, a different one, a different time, but

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they were always hard. You would have to crack off these pieces, and of course they lasted quite a while. (laughter)

**MRS. Wright Miller:** You have to tell about the long thermometer that he used.

**MR. WRIGHT:** Oh yeah. The thermometer was about that long, a candy thermometer.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** I still have it.

**MR. WRIGHT:** And they were very accurate in their making their candy. Of course, that's one thing especially Uncle Orv could do. He was very accurate, and the candy was always the same hardness, you might say.

**MS. SHARKEY:** So the scientific . . . (chuckling)

**MR. WRIGHT:** Of course, with Carrie when she came with them she couldn't cook.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Now, who was Carrie?

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**MR. WRIGHT:** Carrie was their housekeeper for years later. But Uncle Orv was able to tell her, if something wasn't good, what she did wrong, and she became one of the best cooks I ever knew.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** A wonderful cook. Not a fancy cook, but a very good, plain cook, and she could make anything and make it better than anybody else. (chuckling) It was amazing.

**MS. SHARKEY:** (chuckling) I'm sure they appreciated that kind of a good hot meal after a hard day, huh?

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Yes, yes. She was marvelous. Oh, we just loved her. The whole family loved Carrie. She was with them for forty-six years.

**MS. SHARKEY:** My golly, she was part of the family!

**MRS. Wright Miller:** She was part of the family. And she married while she was there, and went to housekeeping for awhile, and when Uncle Orv couldn't do anything else, he bought her a car. She moved too far away to come back and forth, so he bought her a car and kept her then.

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**MS. SHARKEY:** Tell me about their interests. They were such brilliant designers and dreamers. But they had so many hobbies, so many interests.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Yes, they did. I remember as children they had these shadow shows, and they would make different kinds of figures at the bicycle shop and bring them in to make a story for the shadow show, and they'd make up stories. And we would sit there with big eyes, you know, trying to keep the story going. They did all this because they *loved* kids. They were devoted to all of us, and they would do anything to keep us interested. And we went there every Sunday.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Really?

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Every Sunday, and usually for Carrie's dinner, and she usually had chicken.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Oh, yes!

**MRS. Wright Miller:** That was in the days when everybody had chicken on Sunday.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Yes!

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**MRS. Wright Miller:** And this yellow gravy, and oh! it was so good.  
I remember it so well.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Well, I remember that you told me once that your mother would actually bring you children, you and your brothers I think, over to the bike shop.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Yes.

**MS. SHARKEY:** And your uncles had to baby-sit?

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Yes. Well, you see, for some years we lived only . . . well, you might say a block away from the bicycle shop. We lived in the same position on Second Street as they were on Third Street, and there was an alley in between, so we'd just scoot up the alley most any time. And when my mother had an errand to do downtown, she would get on the green line car. Well, she had one of us that she had to take to the sitter, and used to take maybe two of us, and take us to the bicycle shop and then take the green line car and go on downtown.

**MS. SHARKEY:** How was it there when you were being baby-sat by your famous uncles?

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**MRS. Wright Miller:** Oh, it was fun. We thought it was great. There were wheels and belts running in the back of the bicycle shop, you know. They had the . . . that's where their shop was, and they used to make these . . . They worked with wood, and they'd have these sort of curls in wood, you know. We'd hang them on our hair and make them look like curls, you know? (chuckling) That was one of the things we did. And then we played with the typewriter and just anything that happened to be going on at the time.

**MS. SHARKEY:** I had a question for you, Harold, about the Wright Flyer III. That was such a significant plane, and after they flew it and learned to fly out at Huffman Prairie, is it true that either it crashed or they took it apart and gave it all to . . .

**MR. MILLER:** No, that 1905 plane and that, they took it to Kitty Hawk in 1908 to practice their flights before they went to the government. And after they had practiced their flights at Kitty Hawk they just abandoned that plane and left it at Kitty Hawk. In fact, the postmaster down there, they tell the story, his wife took the fabric off of it and made dresses for her kids.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Oh dear!

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**MR. MILLER:** Well, when Colonel Deeds got the idea of restoring that plane and putting it in Carillon Park, he talked to Orville and Orville said, "You know, I think that plane's probably as important as the 1903 plane because this is the plane on which we learned to fly." And he said, "I think if you try hard enough you probably can find enough parts of that plane left to rebuild it." Well, Colonel Deeds got Carl Voist, who was the head of the Patent Department, to go down to Kitty Hawk and they started finding parts of this plane. They found part of it was in New England. But for instance, the cradle for their hips that they worked the wings with, they found somebody had made a swing out of that. And Carl Voist kept finding parts, and they finally found enough parts of that plane to bring it back to Dayton so that they could say, "This is the restored 1905 plane, not a replica."

**MS. SHARKEY:** Wow. That really is quite a story.

**MR. WRIGHT:** Of course, I was in Kitty Hawk in 1911, and we walked, oh, 300 or 400 feet down to the south from our camp there, and the building was torn down, the old hangar there, and there was a box there with just a corner sticking out and sand drifting over it. And I can remember we opened the box, and that was the plane packed in there. And we took it, opened it and took . . . I remember I grabbed a hold of a . . . started to lift one of the

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wings, and the wind got under it and pulled me up until the thing stood still, straight up, and then it flattened out and just let me drop on my face. (chuckling) In the book that Ogilvie had, there are pictures of camp with parts of that plane around there at that time. And when we left, I think those parts were put in the building, but they were never brought home.

**MS. SHARKEY:** You were telling me earlier, Horace, about 1901, 1902, and what a significant year that was for all their inventions.

**MR. WRIGHT:** Well, yeah.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** He was only one year old.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Yes!

**MR. WRIGHT:** Well, I was talking about the historical part, but I think when they came home from Kitty Hawk in 1902 they felt they could fly. The question is: motor for power, propeller for pulling, and how to design its weight so it would carry. And what they did is between December they also built a second wing. And what they did between December and the next . . . when they flew is

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probably more unusual than anything. I would call it a miracle of Kitty Hawk. (chuckling)

**MS. SHARKEY:** I'll bet all those experiments were going together.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Today they have tried to build one, a plane just like the one at Kitty Hawk, and they have taken years and haven't gotten one right yet. (chuckling) So that makes it more amazing, that distance between December to the next December that Horace was talking about.

**MS. SHARKEY:** How did they happen to come to Kitty Hawk? How did they select Kitty Hawk as a site?

**MRS. Wright Miller:** They called the . . .

**MR. MILLER:** Weather Bureau.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** The Weather Bureau at . . . They wrote to the Weather Bureau at Washington and asked them where in the United States was a place that had certain kind of winds that they needed and was available. And they had two different places: Kitty Hawk was one, and the other I think they said they gave them the information that it was someplace else in South Africa or something, wasn't it?

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MR. MILLER: [inaudible].

MRS. Wright Miller: But right away they got in touch with people that knew about Kitty Hawk, and that was what they decided on then.

MS. SHARKEY: And why did they go there? For the wind?

MRS. Wright Miller: Well, so they'd have winds, the type of winds they needed, and a soft place to land. It was all sand.

MS. SHARKEY: Yes, yes.

MR. WRIGHT: Of course, if you look at those sand dunes, they go up gradually and then fall off, and that meant they had a wind from one direction. It wasn't one that varied like other places.

MRS. Wright Miller: It was more even.

MR. WRIGHT: More even.

MS. SHARKEY: After that first flight, I understand it was the people of Europe that seemed to be so accepting. And in fact, didn't Orville ship his plane, that first plane, to England for a time?

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MR. MILLER: No.

MRS. Wright Miller: No.

MS. SHARKEY: How did that story . . . I understood it was over there in World War II.

MRS. Wright Miller: Yes.

MR. MILLER: Well, that was way back after the Smithsonian controversy.

MS. SHARKEY: Tell us about that Smithsonian . . .

MR. MILLER: Well, you could take all afternoon on that. (chuckling) That went on for years and years and years. To try to summarize it, the Wrights had sued Curtiss for patent infringement, and they won the suit, and the judge of the court ruled that inasmuch as the Wrights had created a new art, they were entitled to the broadest interpretation of the law. Well, Curtiss got the idea that . . . He went to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, who had the Langley plane, which had tried to fly four days before the Wrights and had collapsed in 1903. Langley never

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claimed anything for his plane, but Curtiss convinced the Smithsonian secretary at that time to let him take the Langley plane to Hammondsport, New York. He took it up there—this was in 1914 now, eleven years after the first flight was made. They made thirty-two changes on the plane—every one of them they took from the Wright plane—took it and got it in the air for five seconds, took a picture of it, and they put it back in the Smithsonian Institution and claimed this plane was the first plane capable of flight. It didn't fly. Well, this of course—

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Capable.

**MR. MILLER:** Capable. This became a bad word, that it was capable of that. Well, Orville tried to argue, to fight with them, and he got the English to help him and everybody was trying to help him, but they kept insisting that the Langley plane could have flown before the Wright plane. This was in 1927, I think it was, and Orville decided, you know, the English, the British gave them all the credit in the world that they were the first to fly, so Orville sent the Kitty Hawk plane to England where they put it in their science museum in London, saying: "The first plane in the world that flew." And of course this stirred things up more than ever. It was probably the most brilliant move Orville Wright ever made

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because every American who went over there said, "What's this doing in England? This is an American product."

So this went on for years and years, and Secretary [inaudible] of the Smithsonian, who had done all this, finally died or resigned and they got a new secretary, Secretary Abbott, and Abbott would come out here to Dayton to see Orville and say, "What can we do to settle this controversy?" And Orville would say, "You have to publish it in the same places you've published the lies, you have to publish the truth, what actually happened." And poor Abbott would say, "I cannot call my predecessor a liar." And Orville said, "But he was," and that would stop it, you know. Well, this went on until 1942, now. In 1942, they finally published the changes that was made in the Langley plane, to the satisfaction of Orville. Orville wrote a letter to the science museum in London and said, "After transportation"— This was during the war—he said, "After transportation is less hazardous, I intend to return the plane to the United States." And that's where it stood until . . .

When Orville died in 1948, the plane was in England. And of course, as executor of his estate, the first question anybody wanted to ask us was: "What's going to happen to the Kitty Hawk plane?" In fact, we got calls in the middle of the night about

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this. But we finally determined that he had written a letter, this letter in 1942, so we wrote the British and said we intended to return the plane to the United States in accordance with Orville's wishes. And the British, being the fine gentlemen that they were, said, "When you're ready for it, you won't have to come after it. We'll bring it over to you." Which they did. And on December 17, 1948, after Orville's death, we brought the plane back and put it in the Air and Space Smithsonian Institution, in accordance with Orville's wishes. That's about as short as I can make it. (chuckling)

**MS. SHARKEY:** That was a great story. Thank you so much. There was another story that you might be able to help me with, with a great treasure that got away, and that's our bike shop, and the fact that Henry Ford, who was a contemporary, was interested.

**MR. MILLER:** Well, of course, if they had let it go . . . I mean, if Ford hadn't got it, that part of . . . nobody was interested in it at that time, so it would have been destroyed, I feel sure.

**MS. SHARKEY:** And so you feel that was the way to preserve it there?

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**MR. MILLER:** It did preserve it, and I think . . . Of course, my memory, I didn't go back to the other bicycle . . . their printing shop and the earlier bicycle shop. But it's apparently that that was . . . it seemed to me, the center of the early development of the airplane was in that building.

**MR. MILLER:** But you have to bring out the fact that the Wrights did not own the bicycle shop, they did not own the home at the time Ford got them. He bought them . . . The Wrights had nothing to do with turning it over to him.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** They really would rather not have had either one of them leave Dayton, but they didn't have anything to say about it.

**MS. SHARKEY:** That's very interesting. Now, the bike shop that's finally left here in town, you're familiar with the efforts to restore it? What do you think about that effort?

**MRS. Wright Miller:** I didn't hear that.

**MS. SHARKEY:** The bike shop that right now the Aviation Trail Group is restoring in town, right there at 22 South William Street . . .

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**MRS. Wright Miller:** Yes?

**MS. SHARKEY:** What do you think about that effort?

**MRS. Wright Miller:** They were there, and I think Dayton wants to keep everything that the Wrights had. And that one time they were in that location, and that's one of the things they are trying to save.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Harold, there's a story that I'm real interested in, and you had touched on it earlier. As executor of the will, you found yourself with a very beautiful piece of property on your hands, that's Hawthorn Hill. Tell me about that story.

**MR. MILLER:** Well, Hawthorn Hill, of course, was a beautiful home but nobody in the family could afford to live in it, so we kept it for . . . Well, he died in January, and I think we sat around and kept his housekeeper in the house and . . . until about December, hoping that somebody would come up with some idea of how to preserve the house as a historical place. Nobody suggested anything. One time we thought they might make a library out of it, but nothing came out of that. So I finally just called a real estate man and said, "Put up a sign For Sale, and I guess we're going to have to sell it." So we put up the sign one morning, you

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know. And on that morning, Chick Allen, who was president of the NCR, went by the house and saw this sign. He got down to the NCR offices and he went in to see Colonel Deeds and he said, "Orville Wright's house is for sale." And Colonel Deeds said, "What do you think we ought to do about it?" He said, "I think we ought to buy it." He said, "Go ahead and buy it." So we sold it that afternoon to the NCR, and they . . . At that time they said they were going to maintain the house essentially as it was when Orville lived in it, but I guess later on they changed their mind and refurnished the house as a guest house, really.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Yes, and where is the . . . The Wright brothers had a beautiful vacation resort.

**MR. WRIGHT:** Yeah, we were first up in Canada in 1916, I think it was, and they stayed at an island, rented an island. And while we were there, we visited what was called Lambert Island, where he later . . . Well, I think the next year or that year yet he bought. And I went up there the first time with him, and I can remember (chuckling) we loaded a boat up with supplies to go out there. And before we got there, I think we cut a . . . the propeller shaft was broken some way and we drifted onto an island. And we had a Saint Bernard dog with us, and, well, we had mattresses in the boat, so we were comfortable on the island.

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(chuckling) But it got cold during the night, and we tried to get into the boat, but the dog was there first. (chuckling) And a Saint Bernard dog you don't just . . . you can't get him off. (chuckling)

But he used to go through those waters. He had this launch and he loved to get out and get the high waves. In other words, many a day we'd work and do something, some little job around there, fixing the boat. But if we got a certain wind, I noticed he decided he needed to go to town to get supplies. And he just loved the . . . to get out in the open, and those waves hit the boat. I can remember him sitting in the back there, just leaning and would sing this "Wreck of the Hesperus." And you would see him kind of get . . .

(Mrs. Wright Miller sings some words to the song, Mr. Wright briefly joins in)

**MR. WRIGHT:** And he'd get in rhythm with the music, and you'd go across there. And I think he got more kick out of that rough water and just the wind in his face and the splash and that, and . . .

**MRS. Wright Miller:** That was when he was the happiest.

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MR. WRIGHT: He was happiest doing that.

MS. SHARKEY: How long did he have that home?

MR. WRIGHT: He still owned it at the time of his death.

MS. SHARKEY: Really?

MRS. Wright Miller: From '16 on.

MR. WRIGHT: In fact, I think he spent more time in the winter making gadgets to take to the island than he did anything else, because every spring he would have a whole lot of new gadgets to take to Lambert Island.

MS. SHARKEY: Oh? What kind of gadgets?

MR. WRIGHT: Oh, he had all kinds of . . . You name it and he had it. He had ways to toast bread and ways to . . . on an oil stove.  
(speaking to Ivonette) And you can tell her more about some of his gadgets. He had secret ways of locking the place up so the Indians couldn't get in it in the wintertime.

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**MRS. Wright Miller:** He had a special way of toasting bread. They had a coal-oil stove, and one of the gadgets he took up there was something to make toast in the morning on a coal-oil stove. He had two pieces of . . .

**MR. MILLER:** Steel.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Sheet steel, square pieces, with a long handle about this long, and they were hinged at this end so that . . . and he would put the bread in between and close this at this end where he had it hinged, and he would put that over one of the burners in the coal-oil stove, and it was *perfect* when he took it out.

**MR. WRIGHT:** And this bread had to be exact thickness, so he had a special gadget so to cut the bread so it was exactly the same thickness every time he cut it.

**S. SHARKEY:** It sounds like everything they attacked they attacked with that kind of scientific study.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** He was a very good cook. He had special things he liked to . . . When we came there, he left the kitchen and we were supposed to take over. And he liked his blueberry pie. He had a special way of . . . He didn't like the . . . We were

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to make them without any flour over the berries. He liked the juice to run out a bit, so we had to learn all his ways of making everything.

**MR. MILLER:** And we had to pick the blueberries. (laughter)

**MS. SHARKEY:** In terms of their dreaming and of their design talents, they spent a lot of time and energy just designing and building Hawthorn Hill, their beautiful home here in Oakwood, didn't they?

**MR. WRIGHT:** Yes, I can remember, of course, Uncle Wil always said they . . . I think Uncle Wil wanted a smaller home, and he said that they were going to have to have a maid for the halls. (chuckling) But I think that Uncle Orv loved the symmetry (struggling with the word) . . . I've forgot what you . . .

**MS. SHARKEY:** Symmetry, yes.

**MR. WRIGHT:** Symmetry of the house, and he had those ideas in his mind of the home, and I think he built it according to that. And it was a comfortable home and plenty of room, and it gave him a chance to relax, especially in his library there. I can remember we'd go . . . after we were married, we'd go by and see the light up there and we'd go up there, and he was always in his library

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there reading, and he had the phonograph going. And he had the phonograph rigged up so that he could put on a two- or three-hour program with a pile of records. And of course those were the fast records. He had a way of . . . He had a disk with pins in it, and that controlled what happened to his player, and he would just sit there and the thing would play through the whole program.

**MS. SHARKEY:** (chuckling) So you— Go ahead.

**MR. WRIGHT:** Go ahead.

**MR. MILLER:** He made that record changer himself, not one he bought.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Really?

**MR. MILLER:** And it was a Wright record changer.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** One time he came to our front door and asked if we had any old records we didn't need. He was breaking up his own trying to get this thing working. He was breaking so many that he had not very many left. But he loved to have . . . Then he would . . . he had it fixed so that he would have . . . he could turn them over and play one side and then the other side, or he

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could . . . But he would forget how he had it geared, and he would make lots of mistakes, you know. Oh, he loved that. He just loved the whole thing. He just loved to fool with it.

**MR. WRIGHT:** He loved the mechanics better than the music.  
(chuckling)

**MS. SHARKEY:** Sue, you had a lot of happy times in that Hawthorn Hill home, I'll bet.

**MRS. WRIGHT:** Yes, we did. My first experience was when I joined the family, the Christmas party that I got my diamond ring.  
(chuckling) And Horace picked me up and he stopped on the west side to pick up a plant for his mother, and as we stopped there he had the diamond in his hand and he said, "I suppose you want this."  
(chuckling) His mother had told him to please give it to me before I got out there.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Sue, that was very romantic. (chuckling)

**MRS. WRIGHT:** Then, when I got there, I had wondered what I would take for a Christmas gift to somebody like that. I knew the others were taking gifts, so I decided it should be more personal probably, so I made homemade fudge for him. And he wouldn't even

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open it. He put it away (chuckling) so that nobody else could have it when I gave it to him. Well, then when I was married, why, we decided that he would be the least likely person to be thought of to take us away from the reception, which was at my mother's home in Dayton View, and that we had to travel from there to the west side where his father was taking care of our coupe that we were going to take our honeymoon in. And so as we started to leave the house, all the cars started following Orville Wright, and we went up . . . There were a lot of dead-end streets around that area at that time.

**MR. WRIGHT:** There were at that time.

**MRS. WRIGHT:** And so Uncle Orv hit one of the dead-end streets and he drove right up over the field and onto the next street. Had us scared to death. (chuckling) And then he drove clear down through Main Street with everybody tooting their horns at us, you know, and then came up the driveway at Harmon Avenue, and we dashed in one door and right out the other door and down a little hill where we got the streetcar to where our car was parked. (chuckling) And then he opened the front door and he invited all the guests to come in. (chuckling) So that's my greatest memory.

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**MS. SHARKEY:** Oh yes, it's a wonderful one. Thank you for sharing it. Now, weren't you two married in that home?

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Oh yes. Yes, we were the first ones. And we asked . . . I had asked the photographers to come and take some pictures, and Aunt Katharine felt that that was a private affair so she dismissed them, so I don't have a picture, not one.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Oh, that's too bad.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** No, we had what was called a "Rainbow Wedding." Each one of the girls that were in the wedding party had a different color of dress on, and great huge bunches of long-stemmed pansies which went with all the dresses. And one of the people that they had gotten to serve the lunch that they had afterward didn't show up, and Uncle Orv and my mother and father and some friends of theirs that lived close by were all helping serve because this man hadn't come. I don't think there is anything else. It was a beautiful wedding.

**MR. MILLER:** Sixty-six years ago.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Sixty-six years ago. That's a wonderful story. Another great story that I really, dearly want to capture on tape, actually two of them, but one of them is about when Charles

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Lindburgh came to town, and maybe you could both share telling me about that. That was a big visit.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Well, when Uncle Orv knew that Lindburgh was going to make the flight, he was very much interested, and he did not have a radio, so he came to our house. And he told us he was coming, and we had something else going on that afternoon, so we said, "Well, just come ahead." And we had a little helper in the house to take care of the children, and she would let him in and he could listen to the whole thing. So I instructed her that . . . told her that he would be there and told her to just get him a drink, a cool drink or whatever he wanted, and he'll probably just want to sit there and listen to it. So he came and he listened to every bit of it, and was so thrilled. I'm sure he was thrilled to death. And afterwards he invited him to . . . He invited Charles Lindburgh to come to his house, and he said it would be . . . he could be in the house and have a quiet dinner and wouldn't have to . . . he could go to bed early if he wanted to. And he accepted the invitation. And when they went out to Wright Field they picked him up, and the people of Dayton knew that he was coming and thought that he would pass through downtown, so the crowd was gathering downtown to see Lindburgh. But Lindburgh had promised his backers that he would not be in any . . .

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**MR. MILLER:** In any public appearances.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Make any public appearance before he went back to St. Louis. So he told them, when he saw how things were going and that people were lining up, he said . . . he said very nicely, but he said he would get out of the car if they continued on the way they were taking. And so they went by the back streets to Hawthorn Hill. And when they got there everything was quiet enough. They all went in the house and were about to have dinner, it was about dinnertime, when they noticed out on the lawn that people were starting to gather. And pretty soon it was a crowd. And then they were up in the trees and tramping all . . . It was more like just a crowd. They were elbowing each other and they were getting . . . it was getting to be a big crowd. So Uncle Orv, when they were about through with dinner, they went upstairs because they came up and looked in the windows. And so Uncle Orv asked Lindburgh if he would go out on the little . . . what do you call it?

**MR. MILLER:** Balcony?

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Balcony over the doorway, if he would go out there and . . . to satisfy the people. He felt that if they just saw him that they would . . . that would be the end of it. So he

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went . . . He did, he went out and Uncle Orv stood beside him. And the crowd was satisfied and dispersed. That was the end of it.

**MS. SHARKEY:** (chuckling) After tramping over all the flowers, huh?

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Tramping down all of the shrubbery and the flowers.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Wilbur died at a young age, and you were saying—

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Yes, he died in 1912.

**MS. SHARKEY:** Yes, and I think Orville must have missed him dearly.

**MRS. Wright Miller:** He did, and he always said he felt that Uncle Wil was in the next room. Whenever he wanted to make a decision about anything, he always felt that. He felt a sort of a presence there, that he knew what Uncle Wil would want him to do.

**MS. SHARKEY:** So that closeness was still there?

**MRS. Wright Miller:** Yes, it was. And as I said, as small children, they were with each other most of the time.

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**MS. SHARKEY:** That's a wonderful story. Well, thank you very much for coming to join us tonight, and we wish you all a good evening.

[END OF SEGMENT 1]

THE WRIGHTS' TIME TO FLY:  
THE FAMILY REMEMBERS

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