

Susan Wright

MS. DEINES: This is Ann Deines and I'm with Susan Wright, and today is May 9, 1996. And we can say we're in Bellbrook, Ohio, right? Are we close enough?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, that's close enough. Everybody expects me to be from Bellbrook, but if you sent my mail there it wouldn't . . .

MS. DEINES: It wouldn't get to you?

MRS. WRIGHT: It would take a little while longer to get it. I can drive to Bellbrook, even at my age.

MS. DEINES: Oh, that's good. It's a long ways.

MRS. WRIGHT: I don't go any farther than that; I'm a little leery about that, you know. I have my own car and it's a very easy type car to drive. Everything's on the steering wheel except the accelerator, and so I just . . . I try it out every once in a while, and then if I get my confidence up, then I go a little farther. (chuckling) But I like to be independent and do for myself, you know. I like to get my own groceries and go to the bank for myself and things of that sort, which I did this morning.

MS. DEINES: Enjoy the day and get out.

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MRS. WRIGHT: Oh, yes.

MS. DEINES: Let's start with a little background about you. You were born here, or . . . ?

MRS. WRIGHT: I was a schoolteacher eighteen years, and we dated for a long, long time. In fact, he was a Sigma Chi at Miami University, and we went to grade school together first.

MS. DEINES: Okay, I was going to ask where you met your husband.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah. But he moved to Longfellow, or had to go to Longfellow because he moved to Dayton View, and I had to stay in Edison because we were on Riverview Avenue then at that time. So that was the reason that we didn't see each other. Orville sent him to private school then. Frank Slutz [Moraine Park School] had a private school in Dayton.

MS. DEINES: Here in Dayton?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes.

MS. DEINES: Was that for high school, or . . . ?

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MRS. WRIGHT: Well, there were, I think, only twelve or fourteen boys in that. It was a boys' school and a private school, and they thought . . . Orville thought he would get a better education under that, so he sent him there. So that took him away from my high school, where I went to high school.

MS. DEINES: Now, did you go to Roosevelt?

MRS. WRIGHT: No, I went to Steele.

MS. DEINES: Steele, okay. I knew it was one of the two. I guessed the wrong one.

MRS. WRIGHT: In 1920.

MS. DEINES: That's your graduating class?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, that was my graduation class, 1920. And so then that first year I had been studying music . . . See, I have a piano, a grand piano of my own, and I had been studying music and my parents kind of wanted me to do something with that. They had put out quite a little bit of money on that, and when I finished it I said, "Now I've done what you want me to do, I want to go to

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Miami University and take home economics." (chuckling) Which was way off the . . . (chuckling) So my dad was very fair. He said, "Well, if she's done that, she has earned it and—"

MS. DEINES: And you could do the other.

MRS. WRIGHT: It cost around \$800 at that time.

MS. DEINES: Per year?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, per year, but that was a lot of money to a family. I can remember my mother would write to me and she'd put a dollar in the envelope, you know, for my spending money. (chuckling) But it was the best thing in the world that happened to me because I was on my own then. My dad put me on his checking account. He had been an auditor himself and he had always taught me journal posting and things of that sort for him, and so he had faith that it would be good experience for me to take care . . . And he said, "You're on my checking account, but you can't write a check unless I send you a deposit slip." (chuckling) So that's the way we ruled it, and that was good for me, you know. I think that was the best memory I had of my father, how he took care and put me on his checking account. And I did that all the time I was at college.

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MS. DEINES: That could have gotten complicated if you were each writing checks and didn't know what each other was doing.

MRS. WRIGHT: Well, he'd send me a deposit slip, a certain date and so much in there, and that would cover anything that I needed. And if I had any left over, why, of course I always reported it, you know. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Well, that's a neat arrangement.

MRS. WRIGHT: Of course, I was a very honest type person, I think. I just felt that if he trusted me I should feel like he had good reason to. So I had been brought up in that kind of family, and I remember Uncle Orv saying at one time, "You're dating little Susie Blair?" (chuckling) I was a Blair, and he knew my dad and they had been . . . you know, knew who the family was, so I think he approved of me from the very beginning. He and his wife both did, (chuckling) because they sort of managed things that I'd get to go to that the family would be there, which was really very thoughtful. But it was a thing that if you were approved of by the family, why, that was the way it was carried out. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: So you met your husband again at Miami University?

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MRS. WRIGHT: Then he went to private school, see, that Orville sent him to, and then from there he went to Massachusetts Agriculture College, and that was in the East. I remember he came home and . . . His sister was at Oberlin College at the time—that's Leontine—and she was at Oberlin and she was going to . . . She had her intended and he was asking for her hand in marriage, and so he came home one weekend and she said, "Horace, why don't you get a date and we'll go dancing, the four of us?" Well, I had talked to him down at the train. He was rushing Sigma Chis and I was rushing Tri Sigs, and so he said, "Don't I know you?" And I said, "You ought to." (chuckling) "We went to grade school . . ." And he said, "Oh, yes." And he said, "Well, I'm going east to school this year, to Massachusetts." I said, "Well, when you come home Christmas, look me up." And he did. (chuckling) So that was just enough . . . He was a shy person, and that was just enough encouragement—

MS. DEINES: That he would call?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, when his sister said, "Why don't we go dancing together?" "Why, I'll call Sue and see if she wants to go." (chuckling) So that was really the way it started. He went back

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to school, he didn't write to me, but the minute he got home in the summertime—

MS. DEINES: He would call?

MRS. WRIGHT: He called me and made a date, and a very formal date. Of course, we walked everywhere we went in those days. We didn't have a car, and so . . .

MS. DEINES: Now, where was your family living then?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, my mother and father were both living.

MS. DEINES: But what part of town were they in, or where were you?

MRS. WRIGHT: Oh, we lived on Riverview Avenue, and at that time we had moved to Upper Dayton View on North Euclid. My parents had built a house when I was in college out there.

MS. DEINES: Okay, and did you grow up on the West Side then if you went to Edison School?

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MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, I went to Edison. Yes, I knew all the people from the West Side, yes, and so I knew about them. And that's how I think the bicycle shop was . . . you know, my parents knew all about the Wrights through that, you see, so my father and mother were very pleased that I had chosen somebody that they knew. (chuckling) And I think of how fate works itself out sometimes, you just don't know.

MS. DEINES: Yeah. How do you remember the West Side being when you were little? How would you describe it?

MRS. WRIGHT: Oh, you walked everyplace that you went, you know. I can remember there was a market down on the main street . . .

MS. DEINES: On Third Street?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, Third Street, and the farmers would come in with their produce and things. And there was a streetcar that went down from . . . well, it must have been from Dayton View down to . . . Green Line it was called. My mother would take a basket and get on the streetcar and go down to the market and buy things, and then my brother and I would take the wagon and meet her at the . . . (chuckling) when she got back. And so those are things I remember about the West Side and how it was run at that time. A

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lot of people did that, you know. You had open streetcars, you know, windows down and . . . Yeah, it was a lot of . . . I can remember all of that. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Do you remember the Hungarian people that were there?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, and that was fenced in. Did you know that?

MS. DEINES: In West Dayton it was?

MRS. WRIGHT: Down in . . .

MS. DEINES: Or that would have been North Dayton?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, that was in North Dayton. That's when we were up on North Euclid, I believe, at that time. But that part was fenced in.

MS. DEINES: Fenced in?

MRS. WRIGHT: Uh-huh, because they were more or less a colony, you know. Because I remember the Hungarian . . . But we used to get bread from some of those people. They made wonderful bread, homemade bread.

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MS. DEINES: The ones that were in the fenced-in area, or the ones . . .

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes.

MS. DEINES: Okay, because I know there were a lot of Hungarians on the West Side, too, that worked at Malleable Iron?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes. Well, these were the ones that were closest to . . . I believe Riverview Avenue is when we were there on Riverview, you know. But I remember my mother getting bread from them.

MS. DEINES: So what year did you and Horace get married?

MRS. WRIGHT: Nineteen twenty-eight. I was twenty-six years old.
(chuckling) I was practically an old maid, is what you'd say.
(chuckling) I remember he worked for the Miami Wood Specialty Company, and he was only making twenty-five dollars a week, and we couldn't get married or pay rent for that! So one day we just decided, we said, "Well, we're going to take the bull by the horns and we'll make a go of it some way or other." So we told them we

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were going to get married, and you know his father doubled his salary? (laughter)

MS. DEINES: Did he? You should have done it sooner! (laughter)

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, that's what we said. If we'd known that, we'd have done it sooner. (chuckling) That's why I was so late getting married, I guess. We felt we couldn't afford it, you know. I believe the first house was a half-double, but we only paid \$25 a month.

MS. DEINES: For the rent?

MRS. WRIGHT: Uh-huh, for the rent.

MS. DEINES: Where did you live?

MRS. WRIGHT: We lived . . . Let me see, I have to think where we did. We went to Grand Avenue later for \$50 for a whole house.

MS. DEINES: Big increase! (chuckling)

MRS. WRIGHT: And we were in a half-double before that, and that was between there and Grand Avenue, so somewhere around in there.

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Then after that, why, that was as far as we had paid high rent. But \$50 a month was high rent. (chuckling) When you think of it now . . .

MS. DEINES: It would be a bargain. (chuckling)

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, it sure would. (chucking)

MS. DEINES: So where was your wedding?

MRS. WRIGHT: I was married in the Westminster Church downtown. I had taught in the Sunday school down there. My father was an elder there, and so when I got out of college I taught in the . . . Oh, what . . . ?

MS. DEINES: Sunday school?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, Sunday school. It was the middle age department. Not the high school, it was between the high school and the grade school, you know, sort of . . .

MS. DEINES: Oh, okay, the middle school, sort of?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, and I taught there. So I was, of course, a part of . . . Well, I taught in the church in high school in

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Westminster Presbyterian, so that was the family church and that's where I was married. In fact, that was a long aisle! (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Was it? (chuckling) And you said Orville drove you after the ceremony?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, he took us away. My mother had a hundred people at her house on North Euclid Avenue for the reception afterwards, and so we all went out there. He parked on the street, Cory Drive, which was not built up at that time, behind North Euclid, and he parked his car back there so I could run over to it and get in—or we could both of us run over to it. And we rushed down the stairway, and my mother shoved a piece of cake into my hands, you know. (chuckling) So we ran over across the . . . My cousin was there from Iowa, she had been in my wedding party, and so she tried to follow us. And when we went to get in Uncle Orv's car, why, he just pushed her away. (laughter) He didn't want to let her in there. Then we took the street right down, and it hit a dead end right there and an empty lot. He went right over that empty lot! (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Right over it? (chuckling)

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MRS. WRIGHT: So that's part of Ivonette's book, you know—you've probably read that part there—and it was so much fun. And then we went down Salem Avenue, Main Street, and we couldn't ditch these kids that were following us, you see.

MS. DEINES: Why were they following you? Just for fun?

MRS. WRIGHT: Oh, to toot their horn, yeah, and see where we were going to our car. And we couldn't get away! We wouldn't want to tell them where the car was. And Lorin Wright, that was my husband's father, was kind of taking care of it, had put it on the West Side, you know, and so we went clear out to the mansion out there on Hawthorn Hill. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Hawthorn Hill?

MRS. WRIGHT: And we ran in one door and out the other one, and down over the hill till we took a streetcar. (laughter)

MS. DEINES: And did you finally lose them? (chuckling)

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, we finally lost them that way. (chuckling)
But I'll never forget Bus said, "We can't fool with this cake!" and

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he just put it out of it. (chuckling) And he said, "Some animal will get it. Don't worry."

MS. DEINES: So did you ever get any of your wedding cake?

MRS. WRIGHT: My mother always froze some of it, yeah.

MS. DEINES: So you got some later. (chuckling)

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, so she gave me some later. But that was so funny. They said, "Where did you go your first night?" And we got as far as Middletown. (chuckling) That's all!

MS. DEINES: Well, after all that running around, that's pretty good.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah! So that was it. It was getting kind of late and we thought, well, we wouldn't be able to get in anyplace if we'd wait too long, and so we . . . And they just howled when they said, "They only got as far as Middletown." (chuckling) But I remember the next morning, this was on a Saturday, and the next morning we got the Sunday paper and I was sitting there and a clerk said, "Mrs. Wright?" and I didn't even look up. (chuckling) I

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didn't know my name yet! (chuckling) Finally, he said, "This is your paper."

MS. DEINES: There you go! (chuckling)

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes. (chuckling) Oh, and then my cousin who had been there had helped me pack my suitcases, and she wore a little apron and she had rice inside that apron. And every time she'd put something, fold it beautifully, and she'd lay in there on top, and then she'd sprinkle a little rice . . . (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: And sprinkled rice in there? (chuckling)

MRS. WRIGHT: And when we got to this place the first night, (chuckling) we had rice all over the floor! We were down picking it up and putting it in the toilet. And it swelled up! (laughter) Oh, I'll never forget it! That was awful. (chuckling) So she really won her . . . what she set out to do. But she was a devil. (chuckling) I had been in her wedding party the year before. I remember I was going to Canada; I was going to buy some linens up there. I went up to a sorority convention and I was going to go over the border and buy some Canadian linen. So then I got this invitation to be in her wedding, and I knew I'd have to have a dress and so forth, and so I just took that out . . . I didn't go

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over and get any linen then. But I went home instead, so sometimes you have to make your choices. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Yes, you do. You were telling me earlier about the first time . . . Was it the first time you met Orville when you got your engagement ring, or was it . . . ?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, that was, I believe, the first time.

MS. DEINES: The first time?

MRS. WRIGHT: Uh-huh, because his mother told him to invite me and "Give her the ring—"

MS. DEINES: Horace's mother?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes. Yes, she told him, she said, "Give her the ring before she gets to the party." I was invited. They knew I was engaged but . . . Everybody in the family knew it. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: You were just waiting for that ring, right? (chuckling)

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MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, but that's the ring and that's the wedding band.

MS. DEINES: That's pretty.

MRS. WRIGHT: It got so thin and I had to have it redone, and I said, "Do you mind if I have it combined together?" He said, "Oh, no, whatever you want to do with it." So I've always enjoyed it because that's the way they made it, so it would sort of show that it was a partial. And this was my mother's ring.

MS. DEINES: Oh, that's nice.

MRS. WRIGHT: And it was round at the time. It was a Tiffany setting, and I had to have that replaced; and they didn't have round ones, they had square ones then. And then I have another ring that was the tie pin that was given to Bus's father when the Wright brothers sold their first plane, and it's a tourmaline, a huge, pear-shaped tourmaline. I wear it on this finger. (chuckling) I don't wear it everyplace because I don't like to knock it, you know. It's a big thing and it's heavily gold all around it. It's very beautiful. He had it on a tie pin—his mother gave it to him—and so I saw it in the drawer one day and I said, "Oh, that would make a beautiful ring!" So he never said a

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word. He just waited till Christmas, and Christmas he gave me the ring. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Oh, how nice! So who originally . . . Lorin got it when the . . .

MRS. WRIGHT: It was a tie pin when the Wright brothers sold their first plane, and they sold it to France at that time.

MS. DEINES: Okay, and then who gave this to Lorin?

MRS. WRIGHT: Well, the brothers did.

MS. DEINES: The brothers did? Okay, that's what I wasn't sure of.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, the brothers . . . Well, they were very fond of him. He was not a part of the invention, but they were always very fond of him, and they loved his children too. That was the thing, you know. He was the married one who had children, and of course they weren't and they didn't. They sort of spoiled us. (chuckling)

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MS. DEINES: That's nice. (chuckling) So I want to hear the story of you getting your engagement ring again, and then . . . I guess, was this Christmas going to Hawthorn Hill, or was it just a party?

MRS. WRIGHT: Orville Wright always had the Christmas Eve dinner party for the family, and I was invited because he knew I was engaged. (chuckling) So that's why his mother, Horace's mother, said, "Give it to her before she gets to the party." She didn't want me to be embarrassed. (chuckling) And that to me proved that she approved of me, too. It was something there that made me feel special. Then, let me see, what else can I think of?

MS. DEINES: What was Christmas like at Hawthorn Hill? What did the family do?

MRS. WRIGHT: Oh, they always had a big dinner party, you know, very formal, and they had this colored . . . Carrie was the housekeeper for Orville, and she managed the kitchen and she had colored that helped her there. So they did the serving and everything was very formal.

MS. DEINES: Formal?

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MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, very formal. You had everything from service plates to . . . (chuckling) Of course, home economics didn't bother me any because I knew enough about that. I taught enough of that; I knew what I was doing. But I think my parents were quite pleased that I had that kind of a person that I hooked up with. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: You said that Horace worked for the Miami Wood Specialty Company?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes.

MS. DEINES: And that was the toy company. Who owned that?

MRS. WRIGHT: His father had stock in it, and he had 40 percent stock, and the rest was more . . . over top of that, you see. But he owned 40 percent of the stock. So we had that to begin with, and that was what we worried about most of the time. I remember one time we went down to Kitty Hawk, I believe it was, and there was a celebration down there and he couldn't go. We put these balsa wood flying planes, you know, that are very light—you've seen those probably. I've got pictures of my husband holding one. But we put those in cereal boxes and sold them, and we had a

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million sales for those. So he couldn't go to Kitty Hawk, I had to go by myself. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Yourself, because he was busy doing that?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, because of this big order that they had to put out. And of course, he was part of the . . . well, he managed the factory.

MS. DEINES: Okay, I was going to ask what he did.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, he managed the factory. His father was a stockholder and president, and his mother was the vice president, so that was the way it was.

MS. DEINES: Were any other family members involved with the company?

MRS. WRIGHT: No. But he managed the factory. He liked to work with his hands, you know, and he was adept in that. I think that's why they chose him over the other son that they had, Milton.

MS. DEINES: What did they make besides these balsa wood airplanes?

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MRS. WRIGHT: Well, that's about all. That really took. I mean, that was really a . . .

MS. DEINES: That was a big production?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, that was a big setup, you see, because you had to get your balsa wood . . . I think it came from South America or someplace like that. Yes, we had to get the balsa wood from way out of the country. But that is not as familiar because I don't know too much about the business at that time.

MS. DEINES: Where was the company located?

MRS. WRIGHT: On the West Side there, near the . . . Miss Beck, how did she come into that now? She was head of the Miami Wood Specialty. I guess she was the secretary. She was an old maid, you know, but she . . . (chuckling) I remember I went down there to have my car fixed one time, and I had a little time while they were working on it so I thought, oh, I'll go over and talk to Uncle—

MS. DEINES: Oh, is this the laboratory?

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MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, the laboratory. And I'll go over and talk to Uncle Orv. So I went up to the door and I knocked on the door, and Miss Beck came to the door. She knew who I was, but (chuckling) she said . . . I said, "Is Uncle Orv here?" "You mean Mr. Wright. I'll see if he's in." (chuckling) It was a cold shoulder she gave me!

MS. DEINES: So did you get in? (chuckling)

MRS. WRIGHT: And I thought, oh, boy! (chuckling) And she went back and I heard her say, "It's Sue." (chuckling) She tried to buffer everybody that came, you know, and to keep him private as much as possible.

MS. DEINES: So did you get in that day?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah. And he said, "Come on in, Sue!" (laughter) I'll never forget that. That was so funny. That was on the West Side in the laboratory down there. So that was one experience that was kind of . . . (chuckling) And I'd meet her on the street but she wouldn't speak to me.

MS. DEINES: No?

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MRS. WRIGHT: No, she wouldn't speak to me. (chuckling) I think she thought I was a philanderer. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: I've heard lots of stories, and I don't think she spoke to too many people, so . . . (chuckling) It doesn't sound like it.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah. Well, she had her job to do and I could understand that, and he was such a famous person that you could see why she . . . But she knew me. She didn't have to be that way to me. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Yeah. How would you describe Orville, his personality and what he was like to be around?

MRS. WRIGHT: Oh, he liked to tease a person, you know. He'd tease me till he could make me cry, if possible. He tried to say things against Bus, you know: "He can't do this and he can't do that . . ." And that would just *fire* me up! (chuckling) He went back to Carrie in the kitchen, and as I went to leave I said . . . I was almost in tears, and Carrie said, "Sue, settle down. Uncle Orv came through and he said, 'Sue's in fine fettle today.'" (chuckling) I just would bristle up, you know. That's why they called me "Starchy Sue."

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MS. DEINES: "Starchy Sue"? (chuckling)

MRS. WRIGHT: His first iris . . . He was a hybridizer for iris, you know. That was his hobby and he would cross for new varieties. He has seventeen that he has hybridized.

MS. DEINES: This is your husband, right?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah. And he was very interested in botany and things of that sort, and of course I had to be interested in it. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Oh, I saw all your irises out in front, the labels and everything.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah. So the first one that he introduced, he called it "Starchy Sue." (laughter) And that has followed me all over, you know. Even out at the cemetery they've got "Starchy Sue" on his headstone. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Oh, do they?

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MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, Sandegren, who is the caretaker out there, he's been out to see me and he took samples of them. Well, Horace was working on a re-bloomer when he died, one that would bloom in the spring and again in the fall.

MS. DEINES: Oh, that'd be nice.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, that was his hobby, you know, was working with iris to produce something better. So he did produce quite a few, and so there are in front of the monument there, the Wright monument, is the re-bloomers, and around the headstone, of Horace's headstone, is "Starchy Sue." (chuckling) And on the other side, I gave him the peonies that came from his mother's yard. And she's on the other . . . She and her husband are on the other side.

MS. DEINES: On the other side? Oh, that's nice.

MRS. WRIGHT: So they have samples, and he's very proud of that. He's going to make a special garden for display out there.

MS. DEINES: That will be nice.

MRS. WRIGHT: He came and wanted to get some new pieces from me. But as you know, I've got mine all marked around here too.

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(chuckling) If something happens to me, I don't know what . . . You never know what people might do, because you just don't trust them sometimes. They just come in with their shovel and help themselves. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: I hope not. That wouldn't be good. I'm jumping around on subjects all over. You kept the books for the toy company for one year?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, I did. I enjoyed that. Well, my father was an auditor, you see, and he taught me bookkeeping. I know that Lorin Wright was very proud that I could hit a balance first thing. He said my posting was so accurate that I would hit a balance the first time.

MS. DEINES: That's good. Now how did you start doing that?

MRS. WRIGHT: Well, through my father. He taught me all I knew about bookkeeping.

MS. DEINES: And then you just helped out at the company when they needed some help?

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MRS. WRIGHT: Yes. And then when I did it for them, why, I was very careful. I never was paid for it. That was a love job, as far as I was concerned.

MS. DEINES: As far as that was concerned? (chuckling) How long did you do that for?

MRS. WRIGHT: Oh, I guess four or five years. Quite a long while.

MS. DEINES: You probably don't remember which years?

MRS. WRIGHT: No, I don't.

MS. DEINES: (chuckling) You've got a lot of years to remember, so I know it's . . .

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah. Especially now, I'm getting a little worried about some of it. I wonder how accurate I am, you know, because I'm ninety-three. I'll be ninety-four in July.

MS. DEINES: That's great.

MRS. WRIGHT: My husband and I had the same birthday, but he was a year older.

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MS. DEINES: Really?

MRS. WRIGHT: Uh-huh.

MS. DEINES: That's a coincidence.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, and I never cooked a meal on that day.
(chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Who cooked? Did you always go out?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, we always went out. And I always demanded to go to the very best. (chuckling) But that was a lot of fun, when I look at it. And I think about the things that Horace built here. You know, he helped to build in Canada, up there, and that's where Uncle Orv was very strict with him. He made him do everything plumb and just so, you know, and he taught him well. So when we built this house, why, he decided that he was going to do a lot of it himself, and he did all the interior himself.

MS. DEINES: How long did it take?

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MRS. WRIGHT: Well, we were about three years, I think, building it. Of course, we had the brick put in, but he contracted for that. And he wanted it to be sturdy. But if you'll notice, the overhang is quite wide, and he's got a ventilator underneath it.

MS. DEINES: Oh, I see the vents.

MRS. WRIGHT: That was his idea, so that there's never any mildew there. That was to prevent mildew, you see, from coming down.

MS. DEINES: He got some of the Wright brothers' inventiveness in him.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, he liked to build. I think they instilled that in him, you know. When you see all these plug-ins, you'll see we've got plug-ins all over the place. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: All over the place, yes.

MRS. WRIGHT: (chuckling) Every corner. But I love this porch.

MS. DEINES: It's nice.

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MRS. WRIGHT: I have to get my nephew to get down my pillows. They're up high where we cover them with blankets and so forth, so I have to do that. But we cover these . . . Well, one of my friends left town and she had this table. When the tornado hit us, we lost our roof, you remember.

MS. DEINES: Oh?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, the complete roof on this house was lost.

MS. DEINES: It was lost? Was that the . . . ?

MRS. WRIGHT: Nineteen seventy-four.

MS. DEINES: The big one that hit Xenia? Is that it?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes. Yeah, that's the one.

MS. DEINES: So you lost your whole roof?

MRS. WRIGHT: And we stood right in the middle of it, the two of us together. And when I think of where we stood between the bathroom, which was a tile bathroom on one side and another closet on the other side, two closets really, that had a brick wall there,

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so that was the place to stand. And we stood there, gee, and looked out at the sky afterwards. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Well, at least that's all that happened. It could have been worse.

MRS. WRIGHT: Well, there's another story there that . . . Of course, I get an income check . . . What do you call it? A pension, see, from my teaching eighteen years, and so I had . . . We had five checks laying on the desk inside, and of course the wind just went through there, you know. Well, we found one in the hall, one in the sink, and the final one we didn't . . .

MS. DEINES: Never found it?

MRS. WRIGHT: So when they went to put the roof back on, we sat out on chairs. It was our birthday that day, so we brought the fellows that were working on the roof, we brought them ice cream and cake.

MS. DEINES: Oh, how nice!

MRS. WRIGHT: So we sat on chairs and were watching them work, and he came down the ladder and he had his hand behind his back and he

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said, "Whose birthday you say this is?" (chuckling) And he pulled out . . . And here the check had wedged in the ridge beam, and they had to tear it to get it out.

MS. DEINES: Really? (chuckling) I bet you thought you'd never see that again.

MRS. WRIGHT: I didn't think so. I really didn't. (chuckling) And it had been replaced, so I still have that check. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: That's funny. Now, you went to Georgian Bay to . . . It was Georgian Bay, right?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, Georgian Bay, and he had the *Kitty Hawk* up there. You see, that was the boat. We inherited that with Ivonette after his death, and so we kept it for about five years, but it got to be quite a—

MS. DEINES: The island or the boat, you inherited?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, the boat was called *Kitty Hawk*.

MS. DEINES: Okay, I just wasn't sure if you inherited the island or the boat.

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MRS. WRIGHT: No, the boat.

MS. DEINES: The boat, okay.

MRS. WRIGHT: Well, we inherited the island, too, for a while, but we decided that it was too much to take care of all those buildings, and we were too far away, and so we decided that we'd sell the island and not the boat, and so that's why we kept the boat for quite a while. And that boat, I have a picture of it; it's been restored now, you know. It sunk in the water for a long while.

MS. DEINES: Oh, did it?

MRS. WRIGHT: But then that's the way they preserve them in a lot of places. You see, it was mahogany.

MS. DEINES: I've seen a picture of the boat. It looks very nice.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, it's a very beautiful boat. When we inherited it, we had to get a pilot to run the boat for us because Bus did

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not know where the channels were, and there are so many rocks in that Georgian Bay.

MS. DEINES: You had to know right where you were going?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, you could really get . . . And I remember one night we were up there with another couple who went to college with my husband. He and his roommate and his wife and I were close friends and we took them up there. So this Carl Martin had the motorboat and I was trolling. I had the fishing pole out behind me, you know, and we were trolling through the weeds. (chuckling)

So we came a little close to shore, and here was Horace down at the bottom of the hill, sixty foot down from the top of where the house was, and he had a flashlight and was going like this to get us in. (chuckling) And all of a sudden we just hit a rock, and we just scooted right over it. And this fellow said, "I know where that rock is!" (laughter) But I was scared. That could have torn the bottom of that.

MS. DEINES: Yeah, it could have.

MRS. WRIGHT: And Bus was worried about us, you know. But he had taken me out trolling so I could . . . And I had lost my fish. I got a big one. Oh, he was so big! And I thought I had caught it

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in the weeds, you know, the hook, and I said, "Oh, I've got something on here." And all of a sudden I kept pulling it in, you know.

MS. DEINES: And here comes the fish?

MRS. WRIGHT: _____ this thing went up like this, and underneath the boat, and just snapped the line right off and got away. That's the one that got away! (chuckling) I thought, oh, that was huge! I had no idea they had them that big in there. This Carl Martin and his wife went up with us a lot of times. He was a roommate of my husband's in college, and so they used to go up there with us and they loved to be there. And the porch was gorgeous. Katharine's room was a . . . well, like this. It was an addition onto the house, and that was her bedroom. And you had a railway that went down to the wharf that Orville had . . .

MS. DEINES: Had built?

MRS. WRIGHT: Uh-huh. He had a shop halfway down, and he had a motor in there that ran that railway, and you'd take your luggage up that way.

MS. DEINES: Up there? Could anyone run it, or just him?

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MRS. WRIGHT: Well, Ivonette and Ann, that was Milton's wife, Ivonette and Ann wanted to get on that and ride up it, you know. And he says, "How much do you people weigh?" (laughter) They wouldn't give him the right answer. (chuckling) Because that's the story they always tell about them, you know, and of course it stalled halfway up. (laughter) But that was fun. It went as far as the . . . The shop was halfway up.

MS. DEINES: Then would you have to carry everything the other way?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, you'd have to carry it if you didn't . . . We could get it up. It would take luggage up, but it wouldn't always take people up. It depended on your weight. (chuckling) But it was quite a flat thing that you could sit on and put your feet on it, you know. Oh, that was fun. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Now you went up there a couple times with Orville, too?

MRS. WRIGHT: Oh yes. I went up there the first two years after I was married and stayed two weeks, and I had to do the cooking! (chuckling) I had to bake the pie, the . . .

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MS. DEINES: The blueberry pie?

MRS. WRIGHT: The blueberry pies, yeah. And he watched *everything* I did. He wasn't sure that I wasn't going to put flour in that.
(chuckling)

MS. DEINES: He wanted it exactly right, huh?

MRS. WRIGHT: (chuckling) But he was a good person. I knew he had good ideas and I appreciated them. But he was always good to me, and I think he approved of Horace's choice. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Well, that's good. Was he real quiet and shy in public, when you'd go to ceremonies with Orville?

MRS. WRIGHT: Well, yes, he always said that . . . What was it he said? "It was a pall parrot that did the talking." Something like that. That was his answer when he wouldn't give a speech. He never would give a speech.

MS. DEINES: He'd just be there?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, he'd be there.

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[End Side A]

MS. DEINES: Did you go to a lot of ceremonies with him as part of the Wright family?

MRS. WRIGHT: Oh, yes. (chuckling) I'll tell you, it was one of the things, you just wondered what you were going to wear every time, you know, (chuckling) because you were always on display, it seemed. We took a Hawaiian trip one year before he died, and then the next year I wanted to take a cruise in the Caribbean. I remember him saying, "Who's paying for this?" And I said, "I've got my ticket, you find your own." That's another reason I got "Starchy Sue." (chuckling) But I did have my own pension, you see, and I felt, well, if I support half of it, why, we could afford it, because it was around \$4,000 to take a thirteen-day cruise. And we hit Trinidad in South America, so . . . (chuckling) And when he got home, you'd have thought he planned it.

MS. DEINES: Now this is Horace?

MRS. WRIGHT: Horace.

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MS. DEINES: Okay, he thought he planned the whole . . . ?
(chuckling)

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, and that was my idea with the cruise.
(chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Well, that meant it was a good one because he enjoyed it, right? (chuckling)

MRS. WRIGHT: Well, he was conservative, you know, but the fact that I was willing to support half of it, why, I think he thought it was a good business. (chuckling) Oh, I always felt that what's mine is his and what's his is mine. It didn't make any difference to me.

MS. DEINES: No difference? Well, that's good.

MRS. WRIGHT: But I was always in my own independence because I had taught long enough to do that.

MS. DEINES: Is there anything else that you can think of that you want to share about the Wright family, that you remember? I've asked all the questions I had.

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MRS. WRIGHT: Well, I remember John Jammeson. That was Leontine's husband, you know. He came and lived at the house.

MS. DEINES: At Hawthorn Hill?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, after Orville's death, and went through all the papers and sorted them.

MS. DEINES: Oh? Okay.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, he was a very efficient type person, you know, and he got the roll-top desk that came out of the Miami Wood Specialty Company.

MS. DEINES: Oh, okay.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yeah, and so I've often wondered what happened to that desk because John Jammeson is dead now. Of course, he has a daughter that's living yet.

MS. DEINES: So maybe she got it.

MRS. WRIGHT: I met her not very long ago when she was here.

MS. DEINES: Is that pretty much all you can . . . I know it's putting you on the spot here, but we can end it for today.

MRS. WRIGHT: Well, I can't think of anything, really.

MS. DEINES: Okay. Well, thank you. I appreciate it. We can turn this off here and detach all the microphones.

END OF INTERVIEW

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
FOR THE
HISTORIC RESOURCE STUDY OF
DAYTON AVIATION HERITAGE
NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Susan Wright

9 May 1996
Bellbrook, Ohio

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