

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
MARGARET WRIGHT

2 AUGUST 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE  
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.049

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Albert Gore". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "A".

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

---

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

## **EDITORIAL NOTICE**

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by the Albert Gore Research Center at Middle Tennessee State University. The original recording and associated materials are archived at the center, whose collections may be accessed in person or via the web site [gorecenter.mtsu.edu](http://gorecenter.mtsu.edu). After a draft of this transcript was made, the interviewer, or in some cases another qualified staff member, reviewed the draft and compared it to the tape recordings. In a few cases, the interviewee also contributed editorial corrections. This final transcript incorporates the corrections and other changes suggested by the interviewee and interviewer. The transcript follows as closely as possible the recorded interview, including the usual starts, stops, and other rough spots in typical conversation. The reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. Stylistic matters, such as punctuation and capitalization, follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition. The transcript includes bracketed notices at the end of one tape and the beginning of the next so that, if desired, the reader can find a section of tape more easily by using this transcript.

## **RESTRICTION**

The interviewee has donated her or his copyright in this interview to the state of Tennessee through Middle Tennessee State University and has agreed that use of the recorded interview and transcript shall be governed by the director of the Albert Gore Research Center.

Researchers may read, quote from, cite, photocopy, and download this transcript without permission for purposes of research only. Publication is prohibited, however, without permission from the director of the Albert Gore Research Center.

## ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH  
MARGARET WRIGHT**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.049

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.49. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Margaret Wright. Today is Wednesday, August 2, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mrs. Wright located at 614 Shawnee in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The tape of this interview, along with the transcript of the interview, will become part of the Quintin Miller Smith Collection and will be available to the public. Future researchers may include portions of this interview in their publications. Is that all right with you Mrs. Wright?

WRIGHT: Certainly.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about being in the Red Cross during World War II.

WRIGHT: Neil left for the Navy as a musician in early 1942. He would have been drafted I'm sure, but by volunteering, he was able to choose how he wanted to serve. He was sent to Trinidad where they needed a musician. The Red Cross wrote to me soon after Neil left, stating, "We are desperate for musicians overseas," and asked, "Would there be a chance that you would volunteer? You would be on our staff as recreational music consultant." They did not say where. I wrote to Neil in Trinidad, you couldn't call in those days, and he replied, "You have my blessing. I know you are going to do it anyway, but you have my blessing if you feel that you should." Actually, it was a wonderful experience since we could not be together for those three and one-half years. He came back from Trinidad to officer training about a year later, but he served down there a while. Anyway, I volunteered because, I felt that they desperately needed me. We went through a couple of months training in Washington D.C. We had gas mask training and also life saving training in the pool of the St. George Hotel where we were quartered. We got all our shots at the Pentagon--Yellow Fever, etc.. I have a record of those, it is so numerous, it is amazing. We were only trained for a couple of months, and then we were put on alert in Brooklyn to be called up. We packed our trunks and our tote bags. The one thing that they insisted on during training, was that we were going to have to improvise. Wherever we went, even if it was Europe, there would not be materials. We had life-saving gas mask drills and military protocols. We had to know where to seat generals if we happened to run into them. We were prepared to fulfill any needs that might arise wherever we were sent. Our Red Cross class of 64 women, included only two musicians. One man, who had been born and raised by missionary parents in China and spoke Chinese, and was being sent to China. We were then sent to New York and put on alert for embarkation. Our destination was still

unknown. The rumor was that we were going to Iceland. That scared me to death. Every single person I had met who came back from there was just mind-boggled. Iceland had a reputation of being the most desolate place in the world, if one was serving in the Red Cross or in the military. The summons came for embarkation around midnight in our Bronx hotel quarters. We were first in Brooklyn and then in the Bronx. We had been instructed, this is the funny part, to don our undergarments, then our canvas money belt, containing all of our official papers, around our waist next to our uniforms. Next came the rain coats. Our gas masks and tote bags were to be over the left shoulder, our leather purses over the right shoulder, and our helmets were to be on our head. The U.S.S. West Point, previously it was a luxury liner--by then converted into a troop carrier, was already loaded with thousands of men gazing over the railings at the American Red Cross group about to come aboard--64 women. Just then, an order boomed over the loud speaker, "Be prepared to show your passport as you come on board." Our passports were, of course, among the official papers, next to the skin and around the waist. Our first improvisation then took place. In small groups we formed huddles, like football teams, and each woman went into privacy within, to extract the required documents from our almost inaccessible belt. This was amid laughter, whistles, and shouts from the ship. "What is going on below?" That was our first improvisation and that was just the beginning. The U.S.S. West Point began its voyage from Brooklyn Harbor and 33 days later, 33 seasick days for me across the South Atlantic, we disembarked in the fascinating city of Bombay, India. We had first been to Rio and got hemmed in by German submarines. We stayed there five days and were not allowed to go ashore, nothing but the top brass. Then the Navy came and got rid of the submarines, and we went on our way to Cape Town. There we were allowed an evening off of the ship. We enjoyed that. I found that one of the officers on the ship was the fiancée of the librarian. I had taught with him too. He had taught science at the junior high school. Dick and I went ashore and ate fish and chips--that was all we could find open, by the time we were allowed off the ship. There was also an outdoor market. That was great. I'm sure Cape Town has changed a lot in 50 years. I have not been back, of course. When we landed in Bombay, we discovered that we were in the China-Burma-India theater war. That was the first time we knew where we were going. During our two week orientation period there, we served in the Bombay Red Cross Club. We were told about the geography, history, culture and customs of this land. It was so very different from our world in the USA. It was then that I purchased an English-Hindustani dictionary, which I still have. I began efforts to learn Hindi although I knew I would never learn to write it. I figured I could learn to speak it because it was the most common language of multi-lingual India. The technique of bargaining was vital since we were frequently asked by the troops to shop in the markets for gifts for their wives, mothers, and/or sweethearts. The usual dialogue was, "Kittena darm hai?; Char rupees, memsahib; Ham nay mantha (I do not want it); ten rupees, Memsahib?; Nay, do rupees; Teak kai, memsah, do rupees (O.K. two rupees.) Shukriya (thank you) I was able to make all the purchases for the club like that. I really had to learn enough Indistani to get by and to deal with the Hindu servants. One did not mix Moslem and Hindu servants, you had one or the other. I was fortunate in Bombay to become acquainted

with Mr. Sahib Mendonza, a Hindu London train conductor of the Bombay Symphony. For recreation, he played the piano at the cocktail bar of the Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay. He played Chopin, Mozart, Liszt. . . he was just wonderful. In those brief two weeks, he was most helpful to me in acquiring some language skills. He even translated the lyrics of several popular American jingles into Hindi. I still have the copies of these and use them occasionally. I teach them to someone in Hindustani and have them sing them. Ann Betts sang some of these for the program for the D.A.R. and also for the Bohannon Music Club. She wore a Benares sari, that means one made in the province of Benares, and she sang "Han, Piari Beti" which means, "Yes, My Darling Daughter." It was a popular tune in the United States. India is a land of tremendous contrast. The vast wealth of the Maharajahs and high caste Brahmins versus the pitiful poverty of the masses. . .(I do not imagine that has changed). . . to the spectacular beauty of Himalayan Mountains and the lush greenery and lovely rivers of Kashmir. That is Northwestern India as opposed to the arid and dusty deserts in the South and Southwest. The haunting musical night sounds of solo native flutes, voices, and strings contrasting with the ugliness of the pathetic beggars and the revolting cages. These were three-sided huts, fronted with bars, where the Baboos kept their filthy prostitutes. It all went on after 6:00 at night, just in front of God and everybody. That was true of all the big cities in India; the Baboos had their prostitutes. The oasis of the elegant coffee houses versus the many street scenes such as the snake charmer playing a primitive flute, drawing a cobra from its basket, and the ever present wandering cows, sacred to the Hindus. Hindus never eat beef. They ate water buffalo and it was so tough. They would cook it two days, and it was still stringy and tough. There was widely varying costumes, beliefs, dress, and morals of the Moslems, the Hindus, the Sikhs, and many other groups. After Bombay, we were dispersed to various parts of CBI.. The majority was sent to staff city clubs in the Northwestern section of India--Delhi, Agra, where the Taj Mahal is and Karachi. The other ten of us were dispatched from Bombay's Victoria Terminal eastward to the Calcutta Red Cross head quarters in compartments of narrow gauge railroads. Our numerous stops in villages were greeted by vendors of bananas, coconuts, and pineapples. All fruit, before being eaten, had to be dipped in potassium permanganate which we always carried just like Lysol. At each stop we also encountered hoards of begging children, thin and often deformed, with their cries of, "No mama, no papa, Baksheesh, memsahib," and later it became, "No mama, no papa, no perdiem." After they had gotten accustomed to the American GIs being over there, and found out about perdiem. Even a few paise, which was less than one cent, seemed to alleviate a bit of the obvious distress and poverty. On the eighth day of our trip, it took eight days to go across India, we reached our destination in Calcutta. Incidentally, we saw Gandhi from a distance at one of these stops. He was speaking to a group of about fifty people. Since he was speaking in Hindi, we could not understand what he was saying. He was half reclined on a raised up chair and was speaking. That is the way he did his peace protest movement--small group, by small group. Each morning in India's cities one is awakened by a Bara, a servant, serving chotah hazari, which means "little breakfast," of tea and toast. About an hour later, a four-course breakfast called hazari, is served in the dining room. This was at the Lady Mary Herbert Home for

English and American civilian personnel. At A.R.C. headquarters we received our past two and one-half months of mail, a few forms to fill out, and our duty appointments. Four of us were assigned for two weeks to the A.P. journalist and photographer, Quentin Reynolds. This was for American Red Cross public relations articles and photographs. This was both flattering and humbling. It afforded us opportunity to see facets of Calcutta which we would have never seen otherwise. One of these girls from Nebraska, Ester Powell, had been a palace model. That gave the rest of us a complex. You can imagine...She was a tall, beautiful blonde, very photogenic. Transported in rickshaws, pulled by coolies, we had tours through an impressively carved Hindu temple, hearing about Ram Krishna and their Bible, the Baqaquadgita. Of course we took off our shoes to go in any Hindu temple. There are many of them in the States now. There is one here in Murfreesboro. There is also a Chinese one off of Franklin Road. We also took off our shoes to go into a 16th century Mohammedan Mosque, with its Koran, that is their Bible. We went into three amable Sikh shrines where we were instructed to cleanse our hands and feet in the uninviting holy water in a large pool before viewing their sacred book, the Granth. We rushed home for a thorough Lysol rubbing, after that experience...scrubbing, actually. It had moss, fungus, and everything else all over it. It was a huge pool, but evidently it was not the custom to keep them clean. We had to wash our hands and our feet in that stuff. We were photographed shopping and drinking coconut milk from its shell in a street bazaar. I'll show you these pictures whenever you want to see them. We also had a swim in the British club pool, there in Calcutta. We saw the Burning Ghats, that is the one you have the picture of. It is where the Hindu cremate their dead and scatter the ashes into one of the holy rivers, Brama Pucha was the closest. A monument is there in memory of India's world famous poet, Rabindranath Tagore, who wrote many lyrics that have been set to art song in English. "Do not go my love" is my favorite, and Neil sang it a lot. We visited the Parsee Towers of Sirens where the Parsees laid their departed on tall piers to be disposed of by birds of prey. Our photo session was climaxed by tea with Sir John Herbert. He was then the gracious British governor of Bengal. We went to his awe inspiring government house, a palace, with its picturesque Sikh guards. These pictures were in papers all over. Since his wife had died, Sir Herbert built the Lady Mary Herbert Home in her memory. It was a very elegant refuge for English, American, and French personnel. After this enlightening two weeks, three of us were assigned to establish the first American Red Cross on base club in remote Kurmitola. It was to serve the 490th Skull and Wings squadron of B-25 bombers, a fighter plane squad of B-51s, and a British communications unit. We were amazed to be welcomed there over the radio by Tokyo Rose; each of us by name and where we were from. Their intelligence was very sharp. It was spooky to hear my name on the radio. We found out later where the connection was--Dacca was the nearest shopping town, about fifteen miles away. We were warned by Army Intelligence not to say anything in the tea houses that was relevant to the base. There were spies in the tea houses. Spies picked-up any word that anyone would let drop, and so when we went there for tea and cakes we never did say anything that was relevant about the base. We kept the conversation on a girl basis. Our temporary club was a large tent of camouflage jute, which is a big product in India. Rope is made of jute.

The camouflage was painted in jungle colors of green and brown. The club was used as a game room, a rehearsal hall, and for our Saturday night parties. It was the men's recreation area, not the officers. My immediate task was to recruit talent for a chorus and a dance band, to scrounge for instruments, and to arrange music for these. Having few supplies, we improvised again. We drew staves on blank paper for manuscripts, five lines, four spaces, treble clef, base clef. We had to write all the music arrangements on those. It was not an easy assignment. Costumes and scenery were contrived. There was talent, ingenuity, and enthusiasm, as the air force men did all of these jobs. I had to do the music arranging because I was the only musician there. Between flying their missions and maintaining the planes, we prepared for the eventual grand opening of Raiders Roost. That was the name the men chose for the club. A one manual pump organ, called a field organ, was the only available keyboard instrument. It was used for all religious services, all denominations, the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish services. It was also used for the dance band. You would pump with your feet while playing with your hands. The permanent club building was finally completed by the native coolies and our GIs. It was a large bamboo structure, roofed with tin and thatch. Like all A.R.C. clubs in CBI. it had a game room, a library and writing room, a listening room for our Victrola and the few records that we had, a snack bar, a kitchen, and a huge lounge that was also used as a ball room and as an auditorium for our shows. Servants were readily available, but due to the caste system, they were very specialized. From birth and throughout his life, a sweeper, the lowest caste, could only sweep floors and dust cobwebs. A picanna could only cook. A Bara could only serve food and beverages. Therefore, a large staff of servants, Hindu or Moslem, had to be engaged for any Red Cross Club. Meals were of Indian mutton or chicken and dwarfed potatoes and boiled hot tea. There was no lettuce, green vegetables, milk, or Coca-Cola. We also ate salt tablets in order to prevent heat exhaustion. We slept in bamboo bashes on a charpoy, which is a bed, under mosquito nets. There were tin cans filled with kerosene under each leg of the bed, which prevented nocturnal visits from creepers and crawlers. I did open my net one night, to check it, and there was a scorpion. It was just crawling along inside my net despite the kerosene. I screamed and someone came and got it.

FORSYTHE: Did you smoke then, too?

WRIGHT: Yes, but I was very careful around the kerosene. Maya Alise, supervised my sweeper, took my clothes to the dobie. She washed them by beating them on a rock in a stream until the rock was clean. She took the blame for any mishaps, whether or not she was at fault. Alise was wonderful. She was with me most of the time I was over there. Our showers were bamboo stalls with a tank on top which had holes bored in bottom of the tank. On call from Alise, the pawnee bearer climbed a side ladder and filled the tank with water. The bamboo walls of the stall kept you protected from public view. When we found ourselves, often well lathered with no rinse water and no pawnee bearer near for Alise to call, never the less, it was a shower. At the grand opening of Raider's Roost, we had a variety show on stage; a dance band, now with a piano acquired through our Calcutta headquarters; skits;

dance routines; vocal and violin solos; and our male chorus. A dance followed the show with some India and Anglo-Indian girls coming from Dacca. They were well chaperoned by their relatives. Some British nurses and eight Red Cross girls were flown in from Calcutta for the grand opening. Our staff still wore out our miller shoes to be sure that each GI had a partner for at least a few dances. The stage show was then expanded into a full length production called a bamboogie. It was performed at our base first. As schedules permitted between missions, we flew the cast, the bands, the costumes and scenery, in C-54 Cargo planes to various jungle posts up in Assam and in Burma where there were no clubs and little entertainment. I ran across students I had taught, colleagues from college, and a few that I had know since I graduated. Neil had composed numerous ballads for these shows and sent them to me. Ann Betts sang one of them in these programs for the D.A.R. and the Bohannon Music Club. Christmas Eve at Kurmitola, that was the little town between our base in the jungles and Dacca, was really memorable. Just before dusk we had a nativity pageant in the club's out-door arena. We had planned it with the help of our Chaplain Clair. It featured a lovely Anglo-Indian girl as the Virgin Mary with a doll baby Jesus in the manger. Natives served as the shepherds with their sheep. We had real sheep. The men were costumed as Joseph and the magi, the later arriving on camels. Chappy narrated the scriptural story of Christmas. One of our baritones sang, "I Wonder as I Wander," which I had written down from memory. The male chorus sang, "O Holy Night," which we also had to write down just from memory. We did not have access to any sheet music! The field organ was used for the prelude and their accompaniment and we closed the scene with everybody singing, "Silent Night." After this we had a festive party for the enlisted me held in their club, the Raider's Roost, with the decorating of the tree, the singing of carols, refreshments, and a small gift for each man. Our little staff of four had wrapped them all. We then hosted a similar Yuletide party at the Skull and Wings Officer's Club, which they had long before the unlisted men had anything. We went next to the tent chapel for an interdenominational Protestant Christmas communion service. Again, wagging the field organ there.

**FORSYTHE:** This is a continuation of the interview with Margaret Wright, by Regina Forsythe on Wednesday, August 2, 1995.

**WRIGHT:** Following the Interdenominational tent Chapel communion service, we all took command cars and jeeps to a very old Catholic Cathedral for a Roman Catholic Christmas mass where Chappy and the local priest presided. The pipe organ there was far from ideal, but playable. The inspiring service was most meaningful to the faithful US. communicants, who had come with us. Upon returning to our base, our staff supervised the cooks as they prepared coffee and doughnuts for the seventy-five Military Police who arrived at dawn on Christmas Day. There was no one of them over twenty years of age. They were just young kids. We never went to bed that night, that whole Christmas Eve. After about ten months in CBI. I became ill with malignant malaria, carried by the Inofolies mosquito. I was flown unconscious to the Calcutta Hospital, and recovered a few weeks later. Just the day before I was flown back to the base, I was enjoying the late afternoon breeze and a bit of the

remaining sun on the roof of the hospital when the city was devastated by a Japanese bombing attack despite defensive acts and fighter planes. The Japanese respected the Red Cross painted on the roof, therefore not harming the hospital. I realized once again the presence of the angel on my left shoulder when General Wardin sealed the medical facility and told me that we were losing more men with this malaria than we were in combat in CBI. I well knew that many were dying there, both in air and ground fighting. We were painfully aware of this, when some of our cast in the shows, were shot down over Burma and China. The ones who were able to walk back through the jungles and Naga hills, headhunters there, often after being titled "Missing in Action," were greeted with great rejoicing. I served at Comatola for almost a year, during which time we hid in the slick trenches when Japanese MIGS flew over. Mostly they were on reconnaissance, but at times, the Japanese were on bombing missions. My next assignment, along with another Red Cross musician moved recently from the USA., was with the 382nd engineers battalion of 20 white officers and 1,500 Afro-Americans. They were constructing an airfield for the forthcoming B-29 bombers, which at that time, was the largest and most powerful combat aircraft. Our seal, formerly with the Georgia State engineering Department, had two major concerns. One, the challenge of building a safe air strip dealing with India's sandy soil. The second problem was the disciplinary and morale problems of the enlisted men who were plagued with 128 degree heat and boredom. Fran and I were able to help a bit with the later as we established the Red Cross Club, organized a chorus and dance band, and began work on their musical shows. Movies flown in from Calcutta for Saturday night parties also helped build morale. We were superbly assisted with the athletic events--softball, basketball, and boxing matches. These were organized for the men by our special services officer the late Hank Greenburg, baseball Hall of Famer with the Detroit Tigers. Adequate servants were procured and the men chose for the name of the club, "Jackals Junction." Due to the engineers' skill, we now had concrete bashers and showers with running water at the turn of a faucet. For the first time in a year, we had ice. We could deliver club mobiles, cool drinks, and cookies to the men at work. After months with the 382nd engineers, the airfield was finally completed and approved. The battalion was then assigned to work on the famous Ledo road in the far Northeast. As General Cutis Le May's flying fortress of the 20th bombers command arrived, I was sent to start a Red Cross Club for them at Calacoonda. They named their club the, "29 Victory Club." My duties there were similar ones. There we produced an elaborate variety show entitled, "Monsoon Madness," and had the expertise of Captain Melvin Douglas. He was a former Hollywood actor who served as our special service officer. It was there that our Red Cross staff served coffee and doughnuts at 4:00 A.M. to the B-29 crews who were the first to bomb Japan from land bases. Life Magazines photos of our base incorrectly stated that they were located in China. We saw that several months later and were furious. It was not for security either. The Japanese knew where they were coming from. Later, I once more suffered a near fatal attack of malignant malaria. It was decided by my Calcutta supervisor that I should return to Uncle Sugar, after two years over there. Time and your patience do not permit recounting many experiences in CBI. "Nama

stagie meme sa," That means "God bless you" which is a greeting in a parting phrase.

FORSYTHE: What did Neil do during the war?

WRIGHT: He was first in Trinidad, assigned to the Navy band there, and he was also in the Admiral's dance band. That was very interesting for him. He became well acquainted with the Calypso singers. They were the native Caribbean Islands singers with bands or their native instruments, mostly guitarists, who reported on political events of the area and the world from their perspective in song. They did this spur of the moment. He said when they would go with them to sing with the band and do these things, the tune was usually "Rum and Coca-Cola" a popular song in the States. They never prepared their songs, they just started talking and sounded off on what they thought of the British and American dollar, the people, and those in command, Trinidad, the big pitch slate. Neil spent over a year in Trinidad. When Neil's chief retired, Neil was not appointed leader of the band although he had been doing most of the work. They brought in someone. This made Neil angry, so he applied for officer training and was accepted and sent to the Navy's Officer's Training School in Chicago. He became an officer. He found out that by organizing a musical drum and bugle corps to represent his unit he could avoid a lot of the tough work--K.P and things like that. You read a lot of this, I'm sure, in the letters I gave you that Cloy Andrews wrote. Then Neil was sent to Recognition School and then to Radar School. He then went to the west coast and to the Pacific. They were finishing his ship, over a period of the three and a half years, when I got out there. I landed but there had been no communication between us to speak of. Letters were three or four months getting back and forth and full of fingernail scissor cutouts, if the censorship officer thought there was anything in it that might be a security issue. Neil didn't know where I was. There was an officer friend of his, who had been dismissed because of an incurable ear infection, whose wife had written to me in India and said, "We are in Long Beach and if you ever need us when you get back to the States, be sure to call us." I had not met them, then. At one or two o'clock in the morning, after disembarking, and going through customs, and being taken to the Hilton Hotel; I called Eleanor. She said that she did not have a car, but Frank would go over to the personnel office where he had some friends. I had tried through the Red Cross and through the Navy to find Neil, but they just told me he was in the Pacific. The Red Cross could not locate him at all. I did not know anyone in personnel, and that made a difference, of course. Frank went to personnel and Eleanor invited me for coffee while we waited for Frank to return. At about one o'clock he came back and had found out that Neil's ship was in San Francisco and was about to be finished. Frank said that it was very hard to get a hotel room in San Francisco because the war in Germany was over by then, and everything was going to the west coast to fight the war in the Pacific. Fran said that there was one hotel, the Whitcomb Hotel, that is just wonderful about taking in service people. If you will call then and tell them that you are back from being overseas for the Red Cross and that your husband is active Navy, they will probably give you at least a broom closet, if nothing more. I returned to the Hilton in the early morning and called.

When the clerk answered I said, "I'm Mrs. Neil Wright." I don't know why I said that because I have always gone by Mrs. Margaret Wright, during our entire marriage. That morning I happened to say, "This is Mrs. Neil Wright," and the clerk fumbled around and asked, "Are you related to Anderson Neil Wright who is staying here?" I replied, "I don't know, but ring his room." He did and there was no answer. Neil swore, till the day he died, that he was on radar duty. They were installing radar on the ship. When Neil came in at six, seven, or eight o'clock that morning, there was a note for him. I instructed the clerk to write, "Mrs. Wright will arrive on the 6:00 P.M. train this evening from Los Angeles. Please meet the train." Neil said he managed to get someone to substitute for his duty on the ship. He met me at the train, and it was the right one. When the clerk rang his room and he was not there earlier, I said, "Well, give me a room with him, I'll take a chance that it is my husband." "I don't know what I would have done if it had been someone else with the same name. Luckily, it was the correct one. I wired the Red Cross for leave. I never heard from them because we were required to move every week from one hotel to another. We called each other and say we are moving out of this hotel can we come over and swap. There was a rule that you could not stay in one hotel for more than a week because everything was so packed. They allowed us to stay two weeks at the Whitcomb Hotel because we had not seen each other in so long. We spent two months out there. I never heard a thing from the Red Cross, so I assumed that it was fine. We saw relatives and everything else. We had a network of family that kept everybody informed about where people were. It was great that I saw some of my cousins that were in the service. I was there for the dedication of the ship. Neil knew he was going out in several days. I could not get a plane, but I got a bus to take me, part of the way and then I got a flight back to Chicago and down to Nashville. I picked up my car in Nashville, that daddy had kept for me. It was a little Plymouth Coup. I did not stay in Nashville for more than a few days and drove through Bristol up to Washington D.C. When I walked into the National Red Cross Office they said, "Where have you been? We could not locate you." They wanted me to work on GI. Joe, the movie about the correspondent who was killed in the Pacific; but by then had found someone else. I told them that I had wired them. They replied they received my message and they wanted me to do that. I said that I would have much rather been with my husband anyway. They asked me if I wanted to go back overseas, but I said that my husband would rather I did not. They sent me to North Carolina, Camp Button, to do music therapy, which was really experimental at the time. We did not know what we were doing. Schools did not have music therapy course then. It was similar to the Veterans Hospital here. It was an effort, through music, to bring back some of the veterans. It was a huge complex. It had physical therapy, which Dr. Reil, who was over at the school for years, head of the Physical Education program, was there at the same time I was. There were thousands of people at the complex. We served the really ill patients, those in wheel chairs, and some were mentally off, shell shock, captured prisoners and all those horrible things. What we tried to do was bring them back through music and games, old songs that they might have known. This depended upon their age. We had them there from both wars. We did shows for them, and some of them were able to participate. I was there for about six months, and then realized that I

was pregnant. although I went to Duke's gynecology unit and they said my tests were negative. They thought I was having a reoccurrence of malaria. I worked another month and drove home. I drove through Knoxville. Before the interstates, there was almost no way to get from North Carolina to Middle Tennessee. I came through back roads. I ended up in a corn field once. I made it, though. I stayed with mom and dad waiting for Neil to return. Six weeks later, we heard the announcement that we dropped the atom bomb. If we had not dropped the bomb, Neil would not have lived through the war, nor would anyone on his ship. He was the first ship in for the surrender of Japan. Neil and the other men had no idea if they would be bombed out of the water or not, even after the atomic bomb was dropped. Mother and I were eating breakfast one morning, when they announced that the bomb had been dropped. I found out later that Neil's was the first ship in the area. The Japanese did surrender, in Nagasaki. September 27, 1945, Neil Hutchinson Wright, III was born. Six weeks later, Neil was dismissed from the Navy. We met him early one morning at Union Station with a little six week old babe in arms. He knew about it. His father had wired him. He was off the coast of Siapan when his son, Neil III was born. We went back and took some refresher courses at Peabody in order to get back into the world of academia. Neil had been a radar/recognitions officer and had just played music for fun on the ship. He had not been able to seriously study and work on his music. All my music had been show stuff, what we could put together, what Neil wrote me, what the boys brought, and what I could pick out the melody by ear. Neil was offered the job at Stephen Foster University in Texas and one here. Mr. Q.M. hired him, despite his application for the term that he had written, "what was your last position? "Thrown in the gutter" [This refers to antidotes in QMS.1995.25]

FORSYTHE: Did Q.M. ever mention that to him?

WRIGHT: Oh, yes. We laughed about it many times, every Christmas and New Year's Eve. Neil had a wonderful sense of humor. I have missed his jokes. Both the boys have a good sense of humor, but David is the one that really collects jokes.

FORSYTHE: You mentioned a train set once before?

WRIGHT: Oh, in the basement of the other house. We did not build a basement here because Murfreesboro has underground springs. Anybody that is knowledgeable about building a house after they have lived here 15 years and bought a pump for the basement does not want another house with a basement. We had a basement and it flooded. All the overstuffed furniture had to be thrown out. The fire place never could be used again. All my ribbons from pre-married days were ruined.

FORSYTHE: What was the first time you met Neil?

WRIGHT: He was a senior in high school and I was a senior also, but he went to Hume Fog, where the classes were huge. I was graduating from Peabody Demonstration School. I was fairly young because I completed high school in three years, so I

could be with my friends who were a year ahead of me in school. I was playing marimba that night on Father Ryan High School Charity Program. Neil was playing trumpet and singing with the dance band, the high school group that Dinah Shore sang with. Mom got too busy with my brothers, transporting them around, and she could not take me to piano, organ, and dance lessons. I did not take voice lessons until I was in college. I played piano for dance classes to earn my spending money. Since mom could not transport me, dad got me a driver's license when I was twelve years old. It was a special license, and he taught me to drive on our hunting trips. Once I nearly ran over a chicken and swerved off the road. Daddy said, "Stop the car." I did and he replied, "Now, honey next time you hit that chicken instead of getting the car in a ditch." Dad taught me to drive and took membership in Triple A so I could get help if I got in a spot. I had his little Star Coup. They have not made them in years. It was a great little car. I was driving my own car to this, even though Neil was a year and one-half older than I. I had a fake fur coat that mom and dad had given me for Christmas. I had longer hair worn up. I was not trying to look older, but it was just the way my friends and I were dressing then. Neil told me later that he really wanted to ask me for a date then, but he thought I was at least two or three years older than he was. He would not ask me because of that. Then a mutual friend of ours, who was not even a musician, dared him to ask me for a date when we all three met in the lab, the next Fall. It was a pre-engineering/pre-med lab class. Neil looked at me and was very shocked to see me across the desk from him. He asked, "Are you a Freshman?" I said, "yes, I'm just fifteen." He replied, "How about going to the Edward League with me this Sunday?" Dick was standing there, pushing him with his elbow, for Neil to continue. So we had our first date the next fall after we met in the Spring program at Father Ryan. We dated from then on. I also dated other people, too. I was a dance band widow a lot. He was it from then on. I got even with him, unintentionally. Years later, at MTSU, I had a piano class going in the cafeteria building. That was after we got out of the basement. I was in the middle of a piano class when this great big hulk of a football player knocked on the door and came in. He said, "Ms. Wright, where is you father?" I said, "I suppose he is in Nashville in his dental office." "Oh," the boy said, and turned red, "I guess it is your husband that I'm looking for." I said, "His office is out that door and turn to your left. His secretary should be in there." Margaret Davidson was his secretary at that time. The class was roaring with laughter. It was funny.

FORSYTHE: What about the train set? We got started but did not finish.

WRIGHT: After the flood, we had to clear everything out of our basement. Neil put scaffolding up and filled that whole basement with Lionel Railroad trains. Every time I would go somewhere to do a piano or organ clinic, or go out of town, I would bring a train souvenir back. Eventually, Neil accumulated a lot of trains and he had the track all around. He named various things after faculty members. He had Dick and Virginia Peck's well and Dean Beasley's Coca-Cola stop for the train. He played on various jokes. He had a pig for Phil Howard's collection of keys. People found them various places. Phil was always loosing his keys in the music building. Neil and everyone was always collecting them and returning them to him. I think he

even had a little radio station where Earl Hinton was broadcasting music education programs. Bubba Murphy, the coach, was represented by a first aid station for wounded football players. It was just really crazy. Neil had all departments and faculties eccentricities represented at various little stops. The train was electric, of course, and he could stop it and start it. He had bridges and crossing signals. It was really very clever. This was one of his hobbies, in addition to photography. He did not have a lot of spare time, but he enjoyed it. He carved all these things. My son Neil has most of it. My husband had a lot of Lionel Trains. My son Neil wanted them. David, my other son, did not want them. he had no place to keep them.