



From behind the wall

by Larry Baker #35021
O.S.P. Correspondent

The rain fell softly upon the high walls and gun towers at O.S.P. The clock in the brightly lit visiting room showed 6:00 p.m. — usually at this time on a Saturday night the area is closed — but on this night, eight individuals gathered for a special and memorable occasion...a prison wedding.

On November 12, 1977 Pete Austin and Ruthie Benson stood at one another's side for the first time — after being separated by bars, locked doors, guards, and Oregon's criminal law. Both were trying very hard to control their emotions of excitement, after being denied — for over a year — every request and opportunity to share a simple visit together on a visiting day.

Ruthie, dressed in a long, beautiful, blue-jay colored stunning evening gown, her hair covered by a turban headdress made of the same material. Pete pulled nervously at his blue prison denim-pressed shirt and pants — because he had spent the day preparing himself on exactly what he would say to this beautiful Black 20-year-old woman who on this night would become his responsibility. To love, honor, respect and protect. Doing this isn't anything new, for Pete and Ruthie had once lived together for a period of time (three years) prior to his incarceration. Ruthie had given birth to their son named Rochel, who at this time was in California being cared for by Ruthie's parents.

Shortly after Pete received a sentence of ten years for robbery in Multnomah County, Ruthie herself became involved

with a crime and was sentenced to seven years at the Oregon Women's Correctional Center, which is located next door to O.S.P. in Salem.

Pete, a Black man, age 33, had chosen his best friend, William Farmer, also a prison inmate, to be his best man. William and Pete spent much of their leisure time working out with weights and discussing novels they have exchanged between one another over the past year.

A few moments before the actual wedding ceremony was to be performed, Reverend Raymond Helseth, the Protestant prison minister at O.S.P., spoke privately with the couple, bringing it to their full attention the important steps each was about to take within the next hour.

Standing only a few feet away, Jean Peacock, the O.W.C.C. matron, who had brought Ruthie to O.S.P., stood nervously with a camera, ready to snap the couple's picture at every opportunity. Because of the prisons rules and regulations only a one hour time period is allotted for any prison wedding to be performed, and this was the first of three to be performed that night.

Also, within the same visiting room, off in a corner quietly in conversation were three more people Pete had befriended during his imprisonment at O.S.P. Sandy Moore, Pete's counselor, who is the only woman counselor at O.S.P. She has helped Pete over the past few weeks go through all the red tape for the approving of the marriage.

Bill Barrington, a correctional officer, who had been given the job, for prison security purposes, to be at this wedding. Barrington, who has worked at O.S.P. for two years thought a great deal of Pete,

because of the respect he has received from Pete whenever he was working in his cell block. Both of these individuals were aware it would not be until 1981 before Pete's next appearance before the Oregon State Parole Board. As for Ruthie, the Parole Board had denied her until 1978.

Then there was this Reporter who had spent many hours working with Pete, as he, along with other staff members of "Behind the Walls" column gathered written material from the prison population over the past nine months to be printed in the *Portland Observer*.

As everyone stood listening to Reverend Helseth administer the marriage vows, a sense of reverence, along with sadness, was felt for these young people, who have to endure these conditions for such a sacred event.

This Reporter asked Ms. Moore just how many other weddings she has attended, out of her 130 prisoner case load. The reply was between seven and nine, throughout her 18 months of employment here. Moore, even remembered counseling one of her inmate clients through his divorce and re-marriage. She stated she still has mixed feelings about prison marriage, because of the many hardships that may follow.

Exactly at 6:37 p.m. Ruthie Benson became Mrs. Ruth Austin by the laws and in the eyes of the State of Oregon. There was no wedding bouquet to be thrown among the Maid of Honor and Bridesmaids, no champagne toasts spread about, no music and dancing to highlight this occasion. Just smiles and laughter, congratulations and handshakes, as Matron Peacock snapped pictures of the signing of the marriage license.

What had the State of Oregon awarded this couple as a wedding gift? The chance

to stand and talk to one another for the remaining period of time, until the clock on the visiting rooms wall struck 7:00 p.m.

What was their honeymoon going to be like? Until Pete obtains a parole or ends up serving a full 10 year sentence? The chance to meet right in the same visiting room for a couple of hours with a small table placed between them, and under the watchful lenses of television cameras and guards.

Just before leaving the room, this Reporter was able to question Reverend Helseth on his views toward conjugal visits for married couples. He stated that his feelings were that "home visits" would serve a more valuable and decent purpose. When asked what type of counseling he holds with each couple who marry within the walls of this prison he stated that he tries to cover four main areas: 1) Money; 2) Sex (as being beautiful); 3) Communication between one another; and 4) The need for religion within the family.

- And Then It Was Over -

Upon departure, William Farmer, along with this Reporter, had the chance to kiss the bride and give our well-wishes. But Ruthie will return to her room, where tears may fall. Pete will return to his cell, with a heavy heart and a memory. William will return to his cell and read a book. This Reporter will return to his cell and try to write this story of the night Ruthie Benson married Pete Austin at the Oregon State Penitentiary.

Who is to say this type of marriage should not have happened — except Pete and Ruthie? Or who is to judge their reasoning in any manner?

No One, But God, Himself.

Book explores welfare movement

"A Passion For Equality"
by Nick and Mary Lynn Kotz
W.W. Norton & Company, New York

"There is shame in the welfare system but the shame is not yours," George Wiley used to tell welfare mothers.

Today, as President Carter attempts to sort out the "mess" in the welfare system, a new book suggests that the welfare explosion of the late 1960's and early 1970's may have been created in part by one man — the late George Wiley.

"A Passion For Equality," to be published on August 29th by W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., by Washington authors Nick and Mary Lynn Kotz, examines the life and times of the controversial Black leader who drowned in the Chesapeake Bay four years ago.

Why did the nation's welfare rolls suddenly skyrocket, more than doubling in a few years? Why did the effort at welfare reform fail during the Nixon Administration? What are the necessary political and social ingredients for a successful reform from the present Congress and Carter Administration? These crucial national issues and many others are probably explored in this book.

The authors weave together two stories, both crucial to an understanding of the problems of welfare, poverty, and race still confronting the country.

The first story, seldom told or frankly explored, is that of the so-called "Talented Tenth," the minority of upper class Blacks who achieved success in America in the years before the civil rights movement, and often had to purchase that success at the painfully heavy cost of separating themselves from their Black heritage — in the process becoming "white Negroes." Such was the case with George Wiley, who at an early age was emerging as one of the nation's leading research chemists. The book relates the crisis faced by the Talented Tenth when the civil rights and Black nationalist movements arrived, challenging the formula for success and the life style of Blacks such as Wiley. In trying to resolve that crisis, Wiley faced the taunts of fellow Blacks who accused him of forsaking his race. Wiley underwent a painful struggle to resolve that dilemma, in the process discovering his own Black roots and committing himself to the struggle for equality. As Dr. Kenneth Clark, the nation's most eminent Black psychologist, said of the book: "The Kotzes have skillfully captured the human dilemma faced by George Wiley and other Blacks and described by W.E.B. DuBois: 'One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one Black body.'"

Wiley was a complex man. He devoted



GEORGE WILEY

one portion of his life to a highly educated white woman; another portion to the poorest and most downtrodden of Black women. Part of him was always the intellectual, the scholar; yet another part was always the activist. Describing the book's treatment of Wiley's inner struggle and the larger struggle for social justice, Studs Terkel commented, "It is a book of glory."

In its second theme, the book contributes new information and insights into a traumatic period of American history, explaining the rise of the civil rights movement, and dissecting the events and reasons for its eventual collapse. The book presents one of the first treatments of the civil rights movement in the North. And it deals at length with a unique phenomenon: Defying the theories of political scientists, Wiley successfully organized thousands of women into his National Welfare Rights Organization, forcing reforms in the welfare system, and helping to precipitate the welfare crisis that faces the nation today. At the end of his life, Wiley founded a new Movement for Economic Justice, pioneering in the new efforts, now spreading around the country, to build coalitions between poor, working class, and middle class people, to achieve populist reforms in the society.

The book provides perspective to the current national debate over welfare reform and suggests how the country can achieve meaningful reform.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

The Board of Directors of the Multnomah County Library will hold an **Open House** at the Albina Branch Library, 3605 N.E. 15th Avenue (Tradewell Shopping Center), Saturday, December 3, 1977, 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

December 6th — Mt. Hood Community College presents the first jazz concert of the school year at 8:00 p.m. in the College Theater. The **Sounds of the Saints-Jazz Night** will feature the same groups that captured the best jazz band and best jazz combo awards at last spring's Pacific Coast Collegiate Jazz Festival in Berkeley. Tickets are \$2.50 for adults, \$1.50 for students, and 75c for children. Call 667-7390 for information or reservations.

December 11th — The Community Choir sponsored by Mt. Hood Community College will perform **Handel's "Messiah"** in the College Theater at 3:00 p.m. No admission charge.

December 13th — A **Christmas Concert** by the Community Orchestra sponsored by Mt. Hood Community College is scheduled for 8:00 p.m. in the College Theater. No admission charge.

December 16th — The Community Band sponsored by Mt. Hood Community College will present a **Winter Concert** in the College Theater at 8:00 p.m. No admission charge.

The zoo train will operate **weather and crowds permitting on weekends only** during the winter months. There will be a new schedule for the spring around March 1st.

The traditional **Christmas Vespers and Formal Dance** will be presented by the University of Portland Creative and Communication Arts Department on Saturday, December 3rd in Mehling Hall Lounge. There will be two Vespers performances at 6:30 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. Dr. Roger O. Doyle, conductor, said the traditional event is "a quiet and inspiring evening of Christmas music and by far the most popular concert with the community and campus audience." Following the Vespers Concert will be the Christmas Formal Dance, sponsored by the Concert Choir.

The Fourth Annual University of Portland **Christmas Messiah Sing-In** will be held at 6:00 p.m., Sunday, December 11th, in Buckley Center Auditorium.

Featured will be a semi-dramatic choral presentation from the Christmas section of Handel's "Oratorio." The University Community Orchestra will also perform.

Originating in New York over a decade ago, the Messiah Sing-In has drawn wide participation from groups across the country. Audience participation will be encouraged, according to program conductor Dr. Roger O. Doyle. The Sing-In will conclude with the "Alleluia" chorus. The public is invited, free of charge.

Presbyterian Church of Laurelhurst will hold a **Holiday Bazaar and Food Sale** in the church gym, at 935 N.E. 33rd Avenue (one block south of Sandy Boulevard) from 10:00 a.m. Saturday December 3rd to 5:00 p.m. Hand crafted gift and novelty items, homemade candy, bakery goods, and a few choice antiques suitable for Christmas giving will be featured.

The United Methodist women of Patton-Central Church will sponsor a **Bazaar** in their "Friendship Hall," 5023 N. Michigan Avenue at Alberta Street, on Saturday, December 3rd, from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Snack Bar will be open from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. A Buffet will be served from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Adults, \$3, children, under 12, \$1.50. Proceeds will go to missionary and philanthropic projects.



Willie Pritchard, ten, [center] sings with the Portland Boys Choir. The Choir is seeking members for its Resident Choir, directed by Azamar Glenn. Call 254-7762 or 281-8393 for information.

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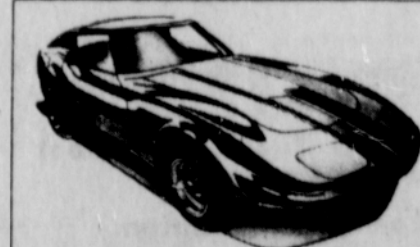
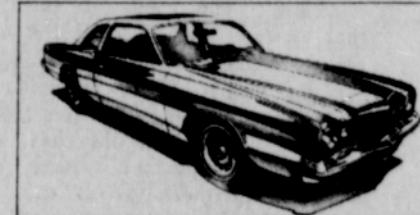
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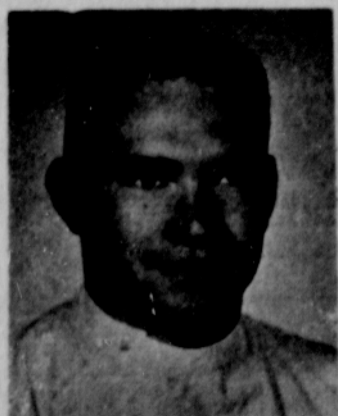
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