

SEASONS OF WILDFLOWERS

Photographs

by

Armine Taylor Wilson

1959 to 1960

Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania

Created in 2011 by Joyce Wilson, Sylvia Wilson, Marcia Neshkes

PREFACE

Following the Great Depression and World War II, many Americans were determined to build the best possible lives for themselves, to make their dreams and hopes a reality, and for our parents, this was raising a family in the country. Armine Taylor Wilson and Nancy Crenshaw met in Washington, D.C., and married a few months after the war ended. In 1947, our father was hired as chief of pediatrics to run the laboratory of microbiology research at the Alfred I. DuPont Institute, a hospital for disabled children, outside Wilmington, Delaware. With their first child on the way, they realized a long cherished dream of rural living and bought an eighty-year-old farmhouse in nearby Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania.

Our father had grown up in many cities. He was born on February 21, 1909, in Worcester, Massachusetts, where his father was giving a temperance sermon for the Methodist community. He graduated from secondary school in Evanston, Illinois, majored in English at the University of Minnesota, and received his medical degree from the University of Cincinnati. He was working at the Rockefeller Institute in New York City when the Second World War broke out and he enlisted in the navy.

Our mother, born on March 24, 1921, was also raised in a city, and was, like our father, taken with life in the country. Her childhood in a busy household in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, had left little time to spare. She graduated from Germantown Friends School and Vassar College. While our father went to work at the institute, our mother busied herself raising three daughters (Joyce 1947, Sylvia 1950, Marcia 1952).

Early in their marriage, our parents became enthusiastic bird watchers and observers of the local flora in our yard and in the woods and fields nearby. Impressed by how much they could find within walking distance, they were like two people who had just awakened to see the landscape changing into spring for the first time. Then, in the late 1950s, while still only in his forties, our father suffered his first heart attack. Given a year to live, he concentrated on identifying these species in the wild as if he had stumbled upon an unexplored world of knowledge. Determined to photograph every wild flower he could find within a five to seven mile radius of our house, he found renewed enthusiasm for life and work.

He and our mother liked taking their daughters along on their walks because we often noticed subtle wisps and formations low to the ground that they might have missed, being taller and guided by a particularity of expectations. As we made our discoveries in the woods and fields, and combed through books to identify what we had found, we relished confronting the notions of popular taste which called an uncultivated flower a weed. We grew to love those specimens that had come into the world spontaneously, full of energy and color. To us, a wild azalea was much more beautiful than a cultivated rose.

Our father also photographed the many historic buildings in the area, some already protected by historical societies and the National Park Service, others destined to disappear as housing developments and large towers supporting high tension wires overtook the empty spaces. Eventually he presented slide shows of his findings to audiences at the public schools, and to historical and botanical societies, to impress upon them the richness of the area in which they lived.

He used four Rolleiflex cameras, two large (2.5 by 2.5 slides) and two small (1.75 by 1.75 slides). This collection of images is also a salute to the Ektachrome film that has faded to red on many slides. We have worked to correct the balance of color. We hope that you will find a great deal to appreciate in our parents' documentation of the specimens they found around them, guided by a vision that sustained them as they faced the changes brought about by the evolving times and by our father's approaching death, which occurred in December 1964.

ROADS AND PLACES

Our mail box was on **Heyburn Road**, but our house was on a dirt road that was unmarked. It did have a name, **Kaolin Road**, because it originally connected **Ridge Road** to the kaolin quarry, where workers removed clay from the deepening cavity in the ground and sold it to be used in making porcelain. By the 1950s, you could walk to this quarry from Heyburn Road through the woods on the original road, which had become an overgrown dirt path. Because it had been so well-used, this road did not have as many species of flowers as the path that continued beyond it to another quarry, the less-accessible body of water that we called the **Second Quarry Lake**.

No one can remember the location of the Keen-Edge knife factory ruins, although we have a photograph of these, but I sense that **Keen-Edge path** was the foot path that ran from the back of the Second Quarry out to **Smithbridge Road** near the **Evans's place**.

The **Lincolns** were our neighbors on Kaolin Road. The **Morgans** lived on Harvey Road, the **Morrels** on Webb Road. The **Wyeth's** woods were on **Route 100** where they were living in an old converted mill.

Many of the other roads mentioned, **Smithbridge Road, Route 100, Ring Road, Ridge Road, Bullock Road**, are well marked on current maps. While **Spring Valley Road** and **Route 322** have changed the most, in which the stone schoolhouse foundation has disappeared completely and been replaced by junctions of tension wires behind chain link fencing, many of the locales listed here have not changed. The vistas, fields, and woods that we remember from our childhood can still be seen today where they remain picturesque examples of a rural Pennsylvania.

Joyce, Sylvia, and Marcia
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