Sadie Wilson

Interviewer: "Tell me a little about yourself."

"I was born in New York on June 25 1921. I was the seventh child. I graduated from Fonda High School and then went to Syracuse University, where I met and married my husband, **Cliff Wilson**. We were married in the chapel of Syracuse University. I was a war bride. I followed him all over the country.



Fig.1. Sadie Wilson.

"We went to the Great Lakes Naval Station outside of Chicago and then to New Jersey. He had to take training courses to be a lieutenant. I had a room there while he was completing his training. My father died while I was in New Jersey, and I was unable to go home. I stayed with my sister and her husband. I was pregnant before Cliff left the country, but Cliff left for overseas, and I had my first baby without him.

"We came through the war the lucky ones. My husband was on a war ship in the Pacific Ocean. The ship was filled with ammunition, and they went on conveys. With one good hit, they could blow everything up and everyone was gone. But I had faith that Cliff would come home, and he did.

"We finally moved to Brockport in 1948. He was Dr. Wilson, Professor at Brockport State University of New York, until his death in 1977."

"What was your major when you went to Syracuse University?"

"I wanted to be a nurse in the worst way. I had all these older brothers and sisters, and my sister, who was a nurse, said that is too hard a life. I can't believe, knowing how I ran my life by myself for the last forty-five years, [that] I let them talk me into taking home economics. I have to admit it has been a wonderful background, but I didn't want to teach people how to make little aprons and so forth, so I took a different major and would have been like a Betty Crocker. And my greatest joy was getting up on the stage in front of thousands of women and cooking a complete meal in front of all those people. It was fun, and I did learn a lot.

"One of our projects was when we went home for Christmas vacation with a light meter and checked all the lighting in the house. Daddy was not happy when I upgraded his electric bill, but it was fun. It's come in very handy."

"You said that your husband was a professor at Brockport. What did he teach?"

"He taught mostly graduate courses in physical education, and he was also a coach of basketball, football and track."

"How has the college impacted your life?"

"I was used to a small town, and my husband was from a big city—Bridgeport, Connecticut. His uncle was the mayor of Bridgeport, so it was a whole new thing for him, to be in such a small village, but he loved it. It was unique to come from the Mohawk Valley with the values and traditions we had there, to this Western NY village, where the stores were closed Wednesday afternoon. You had to remember not to go downtown on Wednesday.

"The people of Brockport were so wonderful. When you went to the bakery, all the kids got a cookie. It was a quiet little village, and we were given a house on campus to live in so we were able to walk downtown. I loved it. I still love Brockport. The people are just lovely. And, it's small enough that all the people are friendly.

"I wouldn't have gotten through life alone without this village, since Cliff died so young. And, when our daughter died—oh my goodness. I would go to the grocery store, and, would you believe, they would open up a cash register just for me. It hurt, and I wish they didn't, but I knew they meant well. I would go to the post office, and they would open up a window. And, one time, I had lost the water bill, and, do you believe, they called me to say, 'Mrs. Wilson, this is the last day to pay if you don't want a penalty. I'm sure you don't know where your water bill is. We have a new one, and if you come up, we would like you to pay it.

"The compassion of this little village is just amazing."

"Let's move on to your job at Lakeside. Tell me about that. I heard you were head of the volunteers. How did you get volunteers, what were the volunteers' responsibilities, and how did it all come about?"

"Well, when I went to Lakeside, all the volunteers did was give out visiting cards. And, I could see the need for them to do a lot more. When I finally took it over, and was appointed by the board to be the director of volunteers, every year I started to add something to our list of what we had to do. And we built it up to about 140-150 volunteers. Volunteers are very special people. They said I was tough, but I was fair. I made no bones of it. If you are going to do this, it's not just something you do when you feel like it. It was a commitment. And they were committed.

"The transporters in hospitals are generally paid. We went in the city, got transporters trained, and they volunteered. Until the hospital just collapsed, the program went on. When people

Sadie Wilson

would come in to visit or perhaps for an emergency, they saw people in the orange smocks everywhere, and would say, 'Oh, when I retire I want to do that.' And, that's exactly how it happened. We did have a few college students, and a few high school students, who could not do everything, of course, but mostly our volunteers were retired people. And they just dedicated themselves—just beautiful people. A lot of them were young men when I trained them and were still there transporting patients when the hospital closed. By using volunteers to transport patients, it meant that the nurses no longer had to leave their floors and their work to take someone down for an x-ray.



Fig.2 About her job at the hospital Sadie said: "Sometimes you have to make your job fun—for others you work with, and for the patients—which makes it fun for you."

"I trained absolutely everyone the first time they took a job. The first day a volunteer transported a patient, I was with them. The patients are generally shook up and don't want a test, and the transporter's job was to comfort the patient, talk to them, and tell them they'd be right there when the patient came out so they wouldn't have to lie on a gurney in the hall. And they didn't. Our transporters were all efficient.

"It got to the point where, when there was a problem, the head would come to me and say, 'Sadie, can your people do this?

"For instance, the head of nursing, **Mary**, came to me and said, 'Sadie, I've got a war going on between the nurses and the pharmacy. They both claim that the other isn't getting things there.

"I said, 'Okay,' and assigned volunteers to walk up to the floors every half hour and pick up what was requested by the doctor, then go down and take the meds right up to the floor when they were ready. And peace reigned. It was a great joy, for all of the volunteers to see that they were saving some of these beautiful dedicated people.

"Of course, during this great storm—we had a big ice storm in Brockport one winter—and, I couldn't get the car out because the electricity was off, and the wires were down on the street, so I lived close enough to walk to the hospital. There was no electricity. Several of my volunteers showed up. The volunteers and I carried the trays up the three flights to the patients. We worked all day. The nurses, believe or not, had just finished a shift and could not go home. And, the others could not get in. So the volunteers were very proud of how much we helped in that situation. It was such a joy because we were appreciated. There was nothing that the volunteers would not do."

"How did you get to be director of the volunteers?"

"When I came, **Ellen Burke** from Hamlin, was head of the volunteers. And when Ellen became very ill, she came to the hospital and asked me to come in. She handed me the book and said. 'Sadie, I know **Kay Martin** is a wonderful person, but I want you to take the book and please don't let it out of your hands.

"Kay decided to step in and be head of the volunteers. I loved Kay, and we were good friends. When they asked me to take over, I said, 'No, I will not take over until Kay resigns.' I would not hurt that woman. Kay was a wonderful person, but she just didn't have the background to be director. The minute she retired I took over. Then, I did do all the work and kept adding things.

"And, I get upset because I get so much credit, and I want you to know that it saved my life. Without Lakeside Hospital, I don't know how I would have gotten through losing our daughter, **Diana**, and then Cliff. I could no longer do the girl scouting, sing in the chorus choir, and attend all the college things. It just hurt too much. So, I just dedicated the rest of my life to the hospital.

"Incidentally, I was one of the people who went from door to door getting people to pledge for the building of the hospital. The people rallied around and donated as much as they could, and we did raise the money for that hospital. I was in it from the very beginning.

"My first baby born in Brockport was born in a house on Main Street that was then the hospital. Our second child born in Brockport, which was my fourth child, was born at Lakeside Hospital. So it's all tied up."

"How long did you work at the hospital?"

"I'm still working there. I did retire. One day, it was a Sunday, and no one could fill in as transporter, so instead of going to Church, I went to the hospital. But I was eighty something at the time, and I was pushing this huge man down the corridor, and I

Sadie Wilson

looked up and said, 'You know, God. I think it's time I gave this up.' If I could let these jobs go, I would, but I can't. If there is no one to do it, I'll do it. And so I resigned. For two years I kept a low profile, and then I went to the hospital and asked the new head of the volunteers, 'Could I please work at the desk on Tuesday?

"And she said, 'Certainly.

"I try very hard not to butt in on anything at all. My volunteers did complain because the job was given to someone who added on to the job they had. So the new head of the volunteers could not do what I did. I had the hours and the dedication. So I told them, 'Stop it. She is doing the best she can and she is overloaded.

"I am very proud that the volunteers lasted as long as the hospital lasted. And anyone who has ever volunteered will tell you they get more out of it then they could possibly give. It's very gratifying."

"What was the relationship between the College at Brockport and the hospital? I know you said some of the students were volunteers at the hospital. Did the College have any other connection to the hospital?"

"Sometimes the college sent people to the hospital to fulfill a project from a course. So, it was connected in that sense. As far as I know, the hospital is very important to the college. The infirmary was small and **Dr. Sansocie** was the doctor at the hospital and the college infirmary at the time. He was in charge of the athletes, and, since my husband, Cliff, was a coach, we were very tightly connected.

"The College was very small when we came to Brockport. It was a friendly group of people, and it was a beautiful small town. We had monthly dances. We all knew each other and did things together."

"What were some of the major changes that the College went through while you have been at Brockport?"

"Well the size, of course, and the new buildings. I went to see the latest new building, the SERC, and I was astounded. It blew my mind because this was a very small outfit when I came. It's still an enthusiastic and wonderful group of people, but, it's not the same as it was. Before, we were a family. The president of the college was **Donald Tower**. He was so friendly. We would invite Dr. Tower and his wife, Helen, for dinner, and his wife would ask if she could put the two younger girls to bed. They had no children. It was just a family affair, which, of course, cannot go on when it gets huge."

"What is it like living in a college town?"

"It was a mixed blessing. There were those who resented the students and who resented the faculty. I was neighborhood chairmen of girl scouts, and I asked one of the faculty members to take a troop. I turned to this girl, who I knew well, and said, 'Mary Rogers wants to work with you.

"She said, 'No.'

"I said, 'What do you mean, no?

"She said, 'She's a faculty member.

"I said, 'Honey, so am I. Come on.

"I did get her to do it, and it worked out, but really they did feel a little bit intimidated by these people with all this education. This was a very small town, and most residents just had a high school education, which I'm certainly not putting down. They were wonderful. But, there was a feeling of resentment from some people. Some of them resented the students. And, I remember my husband, the coach, coming home laughing one day saying, 'Well, I had to get a couple of my boys out of trouble. They won the game so they went downtown to celebrate. On the way home at three in the morning, they stole milk off somebody's front porch. I took care of it.

"But, I have always felt that the students of Brockport are just wonderful. I have been election inspector; I have run elections for the college at times. And the students were so lovely. If they'd never worked on elections, they'd say, 'How do I do this?' They would always say thank-you for being here. I just find them charming and wonderful.

"We see the change when the college is closed. I enjoy seeing the students wandering around. It makes me very happy. And I always find them very polite, they hold doors open for me; they're just sweet. The college has benefited little Brockport, and that's for sure. And I have been amazed at the number of students my husband had, who have stayed in this area. Some of the students came from long island or the city, and then got jobs in Hilton. They liked it here. So many of them had never been in a small village before."

"How has the college impacted your family?"

"I used to try very hard to let my children know to be proud of whom they are, but don't throw it around that their dad is a college professor. My son played every sport and was a star at Brockport High School. When my two girls got into high school, they sometimes made contact with the college students. One day they came home giggling, and I said, 'What's funny?

"They said, 'Well, we were talking to some of the football players, and they asked if we were coach Wilson's girls, and we said yes. The football players were like, oh you poor kids.

"The girls said, 'What?'

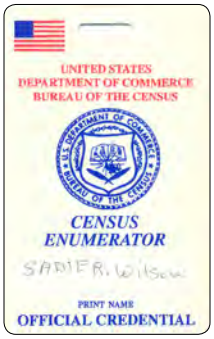


Fig.3. Sadie was a 2000 census enumerator.

Sadie Wilson



Fig.4. Sadie was active in local theater as well, shown here portraying Countess Gabrielle in "The Madwoman of Chaillot", performed by the BUM Players in the spring of 2003 at Brockport United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall. Sadie's character was known for seeing "spirits" whom she called "friends" who gave her counsel regarding matters of importance. Cast shown (rear, l-r): Daniel Odrzywolski - Roderick; Mary Ann Rutkowski - Irma; **Sadie Wilson** - Countess Gabrielle; Debbie Karnitz - Countess Constance; Dave Odrzywolski - the Waiter; (front, l-r): Bonnie Beiswenger - Countess Aurelia (lead character); Gary Thomas - the Ragpicker. It was a hoot working with Sadie. She really got into her character as a totally wacky madwoman and pretty much stole their scene together. And, as always, she was always very upbeat and positive about the entire production. *—Gary Thomas, director.*

"The boys explained, 'Coach Wilson is tough.

"And the girl's said, 'No he isn't. My mom's tough.

"The girls thought it was so funny that these boys were afraid of Coach Wilson when he was a pussy-cat. My kids enjoyed Brockport, and all that went on."

"Did any of your kids go to Brockport?"

"No. Our son went to Buffalo University. **Diana** was at Potsdam for one year before she died, and **Barbara** went out to the University of Michigan. **Darlene** eventually went to Brockport to finish a degree. She had two children and went to night classes to complete her degree."

"What do you think about Brockport being a historical landmark?"

"I am very proud of it. I think the Morgan Manning house is outstanding. And there is a lot if history if you go to the Brockport museums. And my Methodist Church was one of the first churches in Brockport. I think it's very neat that we have the history and the background. And we have a bunch of people who are interested, like the ones who asked to interview me, in getting this information out. And I think that's great.

"And, I love the canal. Once, for an anniversary for the church, we went down the canal on our way to Spencerport, singing. We went through the canal all the way to Rochester to celebrate the anniversary. I am very proud of the canal. It's a very important part of the town. We take for granted the bridge going up and down, but it's very unique."

Sadie Wilson

"What was your overall experience being a Brockport resident?"

"I could not have asked for finer people. For instance I gave my car to my granddaughter just this fall. I have a list of six or eight people who want to take me anyplace anytime. It's a very loving community. And people reach out. I find it a very friendly place. The people are gentle and caring. The atmosphere of Brockport is one the nation could look to."



Fig.5. Cover of the January / February 1993 issue of "Lakesiders"



Cover Story

Sadie Wilson... A Salute to Excellence

by Michele D. Sadwick

Sadie Wilson, Director of Volunteers for Lakeside Memorial Hospital has received the Girl Scouts Of Genesee Valley, Inc.'s "Salute to Excellence" Award. Wilson was nominated for this award for serving as a positive role model for girls and young women through her dedicated volunteer service.

Wilson saw her three daughters through Girl Scouts by serving as the Brockport Neighborhood Chairman until 1966. Other than Lakeside, she currently volunteers at the United Church of Christ in Spencerport where she is a member of the bell choir, bible school teacher, and member of the women's society.

Yet at 71 years of age, Sadie Wilson is still pushing gurneys at Lakeside Memorial Hospital. But that is only a small portion of her volunteer activity. Wilson has been a Lakeside volunteer for 26 years, and the (volunteer) Director of Volunteers for more than 20 years. In this capacity she is responsible for interviewing, assigning and training more than 140 volunteers each year.

"I teach by example", commented Wilson. "I try to instill in every volunteer that the most important aspect of their job is to comfort, talk, listen and touch patients who are scared or confused."

However, Wilson still seizes every opportunity to interact with patients. One day a week she devotes to transporting patients from their rooms to wherever they need to go.

"My philosophy is extra time and extra loving care," Wilson said.

"...extra time and extra loving care."

She also covers the front desk twice a week. This is an important duty for the hospital, quite often she is the first "Lakeside face" visitors see. Wilson greets every person with a smile and a wealth of information.

Volunteers like her, provide the extra loving care that contributes to Lakeside's warm, family atmosphere.

Over the past 26 years, she has given over 10,000 hours of her time to Lakeside. Wilson is constantly trying to improve and refine the volunteer role at Lakeside. The result of this has been a total of $100,000 contribution of combined volunteer time to Lakeside each year.

In return for her time and dedication, Wilson received 100% participation from her volunteers. "It is my very deep feeling that we give what we can give," she remarked. "Each volunteer self-develops and receives back as much as they give to others."

Most recently, Wilson has expanded the scope of volunteer activity at Lakeside to include mail distribution, visitors cards, and meeting set-up. Volunteer services such as these, increase the overall quality of life for the Lakeside community by freeing up valuable staff time.

The "Salute to Excellence" award will be presented to Wilson on March 12, 1993 during the Girl Scouts of Genesee Valley annual luncheon at the Riverside Convention Center.

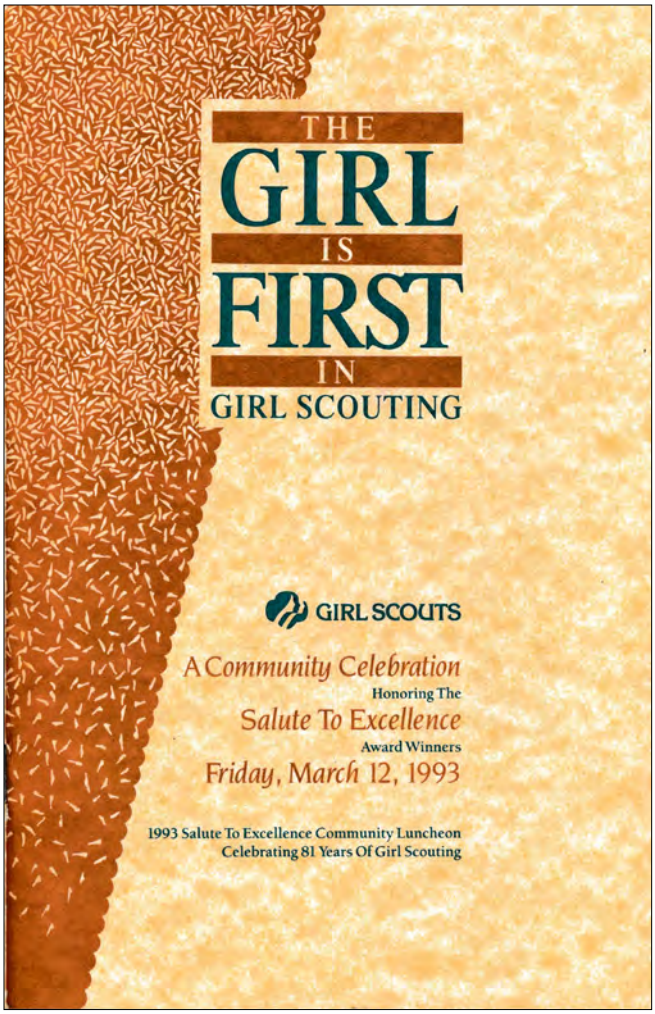
From all of us at Lakeside, Congratulations Sadie!

For information on how you can volunteer at Lakeside, contact Sadie Wilson at 637-3131.

Fig.6. Portion of page three of the January / February 1993 issue of "Lakesiders"

Continued

Sadie Wilson



Sadie Wilson
1993 Volunteer Service Award



Recipient of this year's Volunteer Service Award is Sadie Wilson, Director of Volunteers at Lakeside Memorial Hospital. Wilson has interviewed, trained and assigned volunteers, instilling in them the importance of listening, talking to and comforting the patients they serve.

In her past twenty-six years at Lakeside, Wilson has put in an average of 1500 hours per year of volunteer service. Wilson is, according to her employer Theodore R. Hart, "an inspiration to all who meet her, young and old."

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Fig.7. March 1993 Girl Scout "Salute to Excellence Award Winners" program cover (top) and portion of page eight (above).

3/93

Girl Scouts Honor Sadie Wilson



Sadie Wilson

Brockport resident Sadie Wilson received the Girl Scouts of Genesee Valley's 1993 "Salute to Excellence" award at the sixth annual Community Luncheon, Mar. 12, at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center. Not only was she pleased to be recognized for the more than 10,000 hours she has logged as a volunteer at Lakeside Memorial Hospital, and her almost 15 years as Director of Volunteers, "It was also an opportunity for me to meet (television newscaster) Janet Lomax, whom I've admired for many years."

It seems especially fitting that Sadie was recognized by the Girl Scouts, because she had been a leader for her daughters' troops before coming to Lakeside.

She was graduated from Syracuse University where she studied home economics and met her husband, Clifford B. Wilson, II. A war bride, she and Cliff were stationed at Great Lakes Training Center after Cliff was drafted. They moved to Brockport in 1947 when he joined the faculty of what is now SUNY College at Brockport. They had a son, Clifford B. Wilson, III, and three daughters, Diana, Barbara, and Darlene.

It was following the death of Diana, then 19, in 1966, that Sadie first became a Lakeside volunteer, and eventually director. She works 40 hours a week, and just recently was put on the payroll for 20 hours a week.

In 1966, the 40 or so volunteers mostly handed out visitors' cards, and took the patients their flowers and mail. Now there are 140 volunteers, logging more than 25,000 hours a year, who also staff the front desk, sort and distribute all incoming mail to more than 40 different areas, and according to hospital administrator Robert Harris, over a six year period have donated $364,379 worth of services. (Anyone interested in being a volunteer may contact Sadie Wilson around 1 p.m. any Mon. or Tues. at 637-3131.)

Sadie, who has known heartache with the untimely death of her oldest daughter, and in 1977 with the death of her husband, says she also receives a lot of love from her family and friends, and she shares these lines from an inspirational song: "There is a joy to living, which none can ever steal. When you put your trust in Him, the power of love is real."

★ ★ ★

Fig.8. March 1993 Brockport newspaper article.

Sadie Wilson

In Brockport, Sadie and her family first attended the Brockport United Methodist Church [BUMC]. Much later she attended the Spencerport United Methodist Church for awhile, but returned to BUMC around 2000 and became quite active. Sadly and unexpectedly, she passed away December 12, 2013 very shortly after her interview, and a brief illness. —editor

"[When she returned to BUMC], she wanted to see if there was any interest in a new women's group. She just mentioned to a few women that she would like to offer something and bam! Zipporah began. She had the first informational meeting at her home on Kimberlin Drive in February 2002, and about 10 women showed up. She remained a strong leader in the group until her death in 2013. With her Zipporah "girls" she helped organized ziti dinners, made table cloths for the fellowship hall tables, made banners for the church, selected photographs for display in the fellowship hall, arranged for Christmas carolling at the nursing home and supported a child from the Miracle Garden in India. Once a year she led the way for Zipporah to conduct our church service, many times volunteering to do the sermon. She also was involved with fund raising for apportionments and one year organized "First Night", a family oriented New Year's Eve party held in our church Fellowship Hall. She was a wonderful Christian women who shared her faith with all!

She also enjoyed singing in the choir for a short time until her voice began to fade!"

—Posthumous recollections by Debbie Thomas



Fig.9. 2003 Certificate of Appreciation.

"Where does one begin to speak about Miss Sadie, the 92 year young ball of energy and enthusiasm. I am a new member of Zipporah. However, I have known Sadie and the family for 50 years. We grew up in the same neighborhood and in this church and she was our Girl Scout leader. I have thoroughly enjoyed reconnecting with her and spending more time with her. So I am going to do my best to share with you what Sadie meant to the women in Zipporah.

Thankful, thankful, for Sadie forming Zipporah. Thankful for knowing Sadie. She was loved and she showed love, she was respected, she was special, strong, an inspiration, independent, busy and involved, she was active and participatory in life—yet reminded us to slow down to take care of ourselves. There were days when I would pick her up [and] think: 'She moves faster than I do, and has more energy'. She was kind, welcoming, always there with a smile and a hug, she loved the little children and she was a very good friend.

I think the strongest, most common thread expressed by many, that sums her up the best, was her strong passion for her Faith, Family and Friends. She showed us and reminded us that we will all have doubts and fall short in life but to always keep a strong relationship with God.

She would be the first one to tell you that she was blessed and had a good long run, she is a legacy and she will be greatly missed." *—Beverly Whiteman, at Sadie's memorial service*

Acknowledgements:

Interviewer: Amber Wodraska, student, SUNY College at Brockport Public History Project for the Brockport Community Museum, with facilitator Sue Savard
Interview date: Thursday, November 29, 2013
Location: Interviewee's home
Fig.1-8: Loaned by interviewee
Layout and Image adjustment: Norm Frisch