

Being a Citizen

Theme Description:

The stories in this theme focus on what it means to be a citizen of the United States. Some stories are political and some are personal, but they all provide insight on how individual's lives contribute to a democracy.

1. Wayne Wright

File Name: 1.Wright_Childrens_Books

Interviewed: 2009

Biographical Info: *Wayne Wright grew up in Oneonta, NY in the 1950s and has lived there his entire life. He went back to school after being drafted in the Vietnam War. He worked at the New York State Historical Association Library for over 30 years, and is now retired. In this story, Wayne describes his love of children's books and the lessons they teach.*

Wayne Wright [WW]: The other thing that I have done for years was work on a bibliography of children's author Thornton Burgess and I did this bibliography. This was my graduate thesis. A thesis can turn into something that has a life after a thesis because I had mine published and this is the second edition that was published in 2009 and I describe the works of Thornton Burgess who wrote animal stories. He was one of my favorite authors when I was a boy and I know everything about every edition of every book he ever wrote. Like how many pages it is and who drew the pictures and all those things. There's lots of things to do in life. With that I found something that nobody else knew anything about and you can become the expert in it if you find something that nobody knows anything else about.

Interviewer: Was there a common theme in Thornton Burgess' books?

WW: He was very interested in teaching people about wildlife and he also put a little bit of moral values into each of the stories. He tried to teach each of his readers right and wrong through reading about animal characters who sometimes did wrong and how they learned from them. He tried to teach not only about wildlife but just how to be better citizens. I guess I always appreciated that. His books have been ones that I have read since I was really small. I have always liked all kinds of children's books.

Sample question prompts:

- What kinds of books do you like to read?
- Have the types of books you enjoy changed over time?
- Over the course of your life, how have you learned how to be a good citizen?
- What do you think it means to be a good citizen?

2. Carol Waller

File Name: 2.Waller_Running_For_Office

Interviewed: 2011

Biographical Info: *Carol Waller was the first female mayor of Cooperstown, New York. She was born in Queens, New York in 1946 and grew up on Long Island. She moved to Cooperstown*

after marrying, and has worked in the floral industry in addition to holding political office. In this story, she talks about how she became interested in local government and overcame her fear of holding a political office.

When we moved back from Colorado; my husband was very active before we left. He was a volunteer fireman, he was a Lion, and he was all those things. And when we moved back he said to me, why don't you get involved, the kids are old enough to get involved in different things. So my father being in politics, we always talked about politics a lot, said why don't you run for village board? I said I don't know a thing about that. So I did. I ran for trustee. I thought, oh I'll give it a try, how hard can it be? I need an outlet from this to take my mind off the flower shop 24/7 to have my mind go somewhere else. I only won by two votes. That was the election. I drank a little too much the night I won, because I was like, oh God what am I going to do now, I've won. I went to my first meeting, I was so scared. Thought oh I'm going to screw this up. There's a 4-million-dollar budget! I got put on finance my first year, oh my lord. I got put on police. I was a nervous wreck. Had a mayor, him and I have come to terms, but [he] put me on entertainment. Entertainment then used to be planning and entertainment. Entertainment was getting a cup of coffee and he said to me, "you can go get me a cup of coffee." I got him a cup of coffee and I said, "it's the first and the last I'll ever get for you." I'm a little bit of a woman's libber when it comes to that. I found it very fascinating. It taught me tremendous patience. There, you've got to go through this committee, that committee, this regulation, that regulation. It taught me how to listen. It taught me how to open my mind. A lot of times I would look at everything, make up my mind, and I'm very stubborn and I'd say that's the way it's got to be. But in government, you have to listen to the people. So when you listen to the people you realize that there's more opinions out there. Sometimes, if you listen, some of the things you've made up your mind about are wrong.

Sample question prompts:

- Did you or your family members ever run for a political office?
- Have you ever participated in local government, even if it's just attending a town meeting or signing a petition? What was it like?
- The woman in this story talks about being scared to mess up as a village trustee. Did you ever try something you were worried you couldn't do?

3. Dorothy Hudson

File Name: 3.Hudson_Voting_Machines

Interviewed: 2012

Biographical Info: *Dorothy Hudson was born in 1937 and spent her childhood in East Brunswick, New Jersey. She moved to Cooperstown, NY in 1974 and began to volunteer in local organizations. In this story, she talks about her work with the League of Women Voters.*

When I was in the League of Women Voters back then we were talking about voters' rights and the environment. Another thing we've succeeded in, we were paying a lot of attention to the voting machines, because our voting machines were getting old and decrepit. And after the Gore-Bush election the government paid a lot of attention to the voters' rights. So they said our machines, we couldn't use them anymore, because they weren't handicap accessible, which they aren't. So locally they said, well we'll just get nice computerized machines, and some of us in

the League and Verified Voting Group realized that those machines were hackable. We worked very hard, we did a lot of praying as much as anything, to not get just plain electronic, computerized machines, to get the paper ballot, which can be counted. Whether they are or not in a close election is another question. But they can count them. I at least feel like we've accomplished something on that line. I feel very comfortable lobbying the government to do what we think is the right thing.

Sample question prompts:

- Are you a registered voter?
- Do you enjoy voting? Why or why not?
- Can you tell me about something you voted for that was particularly important to you?
- Do you think the people you have known in your life generally feel like their votes count, and their voices are heard in the nation?

4. Charlotte Collett

File Name: 5.Collett_Sources_of_Pride

Interviewed: 2016

Biographical Info: *Charlotte Collett was born in Harlem, New York in 1951. She grew up in government housing during the 1950s and 60s, and attended the State University of New York at Old Westbury, Columbia Teacher's College, and received a PhD from New York University. In addition to teaching in New York City public schools for over 30 years, she has played the violin and sung the blues around the world. In this story, she talks about her childhood in Harlem.*

So when I was growing up in the projects, I remember Berry Gordy, the Supremes, the Temptations, and the Four Tops, and I remember a feeling of--that was a feeling of pride. That was a feeling of pride because you saw all of these really talented black people singing and dancing and moving. That was a real source of pride in the ghetto. I also remember there were drugs in the ghetto, a lot of heroin. That kind of descended on the neighborhood at about the time of all the '60s political activity. I remember H. Rap Brown and the Black Panthers, Malcolm X. Malcolm X used to speak on the corner of Lenox Avenue and 115th street. I remember leaving my project and going to the bodega across the street and he was right on the corner speaking. His mosque was on 116th Street and 7th Avenue. Mosque number 7 was right around the corner from where I grew up. So there was a lot of stuff going on, percolating. I went to a music and art high school. Before high school, I sang sometimes for shows in elementary school and we went to junior high school during the time in New York City where you studied an instrument. My sister studied the cello, and I studied the violin. Someone else studied the viola and we would get together in our project apartment, 20 West 115 Street Apartment 6G, and we'd get together in the living room and practice the string instruments. To this day, I love classical music because of that, between that and singing in church. I really love classical music, I love strings and Baroque music in particular. We used to practice and my violin teacher was Mr. Gilbert, he was a black man. We played in the orchestra and then eventually I played in the all-city orchestra in New York City.

I remember one night performing and there was Mayor [John] Lindsay, who when there was a riot in Harlem, came up to Harlem and quieted the riot. He was popular among black people. So a lot of white people hated him for that, but he did walk the streets and quiet [them]. He just

came out and asked people to stop and they stopped. There was music. There was politics growing up. There were worries about money. There were a lot of people on welfare. There were a lot of people getting government stuff. You knew that your life was different because you would turn on the television and there would be “Leave it to Beaver” and all of these little “perfect families” for the time; images of 1950s middle-class white America at the time. You knew that there was a big difference between how they were living and how we were living. You could see the disparities.

Sample question prompts:

- Did you feel pride in the neighborhood where you grew up?
- What was your community like?
- In this story, we hear about a lot of political and social change going on in Harlem during this woman’s childhood. Have you experienced any big periods of change? What were they like, and how did they affect your life?
- Did you feel like the “American Dream” was possible in your own life?

5. Erika Heinegg

File Name: 6.Heinegg_Dealing_with_Discrimination

Interviewed: 2012

Biographical Info: *Erika Heinegg is a German immigrant living in Oneonta, NY. She was born in 1934 and left the country at age 18 so she could become a nurse. She lived in Sweden, England, and Canada before moving to New York State. She was able to become a nurse, although she was not allowed to do certain work because she was not born in America. In this story, she talks about the problems she faced due to discrimination.*

I decided this was my opportunity to get a nursing degree because my English experience was not accepted in this country. I graduated in 1977 from Hartwick College's nursing program. I was accepted to the public health nursing service in Delaware County in Delhi.

The first 6 weeks or so--I don't know whether it was 6 weeks or 6 months--was sort of a trial period. When I had that interview, my superior took me into her car outside the building and told me that I could work for six months. She found nothing wrong with my performance except that her father had told her that I should never be promoted. If I were to accept that, I could work in public health. When I asked why I would not be promoted, she said, 'Because you are German. My father doesn't want me to promote you because you are German.' In 1977, there was very little one could do about that, but I had my children. My husband had a job, so I had to accept that position.

Well, when we first came to this country in 1960, what happened was, my husband was Catholic. I was Lutheran. When we got married, we got married in a little chapel next to the hospital in Rochford. The priest, who was a monk, when he heard that I was a Lutheran and my husband was a Catholic, he moved his chair 12 feet away because he was afraid of us going to infect him or something and almost didn't want to marry us (laughing). But those were scenes that people lived with, and fortunately, 30, 40 years later, we have learned a little bit more not to do that but still it took a while. We had to learn. Everybody had to learn these things.

Sample question prompts:

- Do you have any friends or family members from other countries?
- Were there any controversial marriages among your family or friends?
- Do you think your career was ever held back by something beyond your control, such as your nationality or gender?
- This story is about the 1960s and 1970s. Do you think America still has problems with discrimination?

6. Hilda Wilcox

File Name: 7.Wilcox_Integration_at_School

Interviewed: 2010

Biographical Info: *Hilda Wilcox was born in Utica, New York in 1929 and moved to Cooperstown with her husband and three children in 1969. She taught English at the University of Texas, Wagner College, and SUNY Oneonta. In this story, she talks about fighting for Civil Rights and what it was like to teach during the early days of integration at the University of Texas.*

Interviewer: Was the high school just starting to be integrated at that time when you started?

Hilda Wilcox [HW]: The high schools? I think in that part of Nassau County... I don't remember ever seeing a black student. But you know I was a member of the NAACP when I was 15 in Utica, I think I told you that before, so, it was a very exciting thing that happened at the University of Texas because at that time it went over the international news circuit that, I think I told you, the girl who got the part of Dido in Dido and Aeneas. She's from some place in North Africa, Dido, and Aeneas ... she loved Aeneas. The girl who got it, her last name was Smith, she was black and she got the part of Dido and it was perfect. The graduate school, like the school of music, was already integrated during the first year I taught at the University of Texas. But the legislature was determined that she would not play that role in the opera. But she had already won it. So this was a real problem and they had a faculty meeting and the auditorium was just filled with professors and the president of the university, you know, tried to finagle us into saying that it would be all right to have somebody else take that role. And, very quickly, there was a first to support that motion. But then this man stood up, who later turned out to be a conservative president of Boston, I can't remember if it's Boston College or Boston University. I think it's Boston College I'm very bad at names now. So I cannot remember his name, but he was told that he was out of order. There wasn't to be any discussion, but he went on talking, which was the bravest act I've ever seen.

Interviewer: He was in support of...

HW: To support discussion for the girl staying in the role. But then they had a vote and it was overwhelmingly to support what the president wanted, because his argument was that if we just go along with what the legislature says, and they had threatened to withdraw funds from the music school if we didn't go along, then later on it would be easier to make our own rules kind of thing. If we just cooperated [laughs]. There were eight people still sitting, I can still see them they were sitting towards the front. I was sitting towards the front and we were still sitting when everybody else left. And we looked at each other. We were deeply moved to feel that we were in

a very special group. It was against the law by the way, to belong to the NAACP if you worked for the state of Texas. Can you believe that? It was against the law or at least against the rules of the university, I don't remember which.

Sample question prompts:

- Was there much racial diversity in your school when you were growing up?
- Did your family members ever talk about integration?
- Have you seen changes in civil rights over the course of your life?
- How have you seen your fellow citizens fight for change, whether on big issues or small?

7. David Ingalls

File Name: 8.Ingalls_Military_Support

Interviewed: 2013

Biographical Info: *David Ingalls was born in 1949 and grew up as the third generation to work a farm in Cooperstown, NY. He went to college and returned to the farm, also working as a school guidance counselor for 35 years. In this story, he talks about returning to the farm in the summer while he was at college, and the conversations he had with his father about the Vietnam War.*

David Ingalls [DI]: Coming back, my first year back from college, it was hay season and they were long hard days. My dad and I were about to load hay in the haymow. And, you know, there are two tons of hay bales, and my dad pushed them up the elevator. It's about ninety-eight degrees in the haymow, and all that hay dust, and you've got to stack two tons in about twenty minutes. I can remember saying to my dad before I went up, I said, "Dad, you know, I'm a college boy now. Isn't this a job for the hired man?" And my dad had a tough side to him. He said, "Well, the hired man was here for the five o'clock milking this morning. Where were you?" And then, he said, "I want you to hear me real clearly. If you are too educated to stack hay bales, you're too educated for your own good." So he said, "Get up that mow." Then he said, "Get rid of that bandana, because there won't be any hawks living on this farm while your brother is in Vietnam." The objectors to the war, and we probably all should have been, wore these bandanas around their forehead. Well, mine was a drip strip, for when you were working the mow. But my dad took the metaphor as being from that perspective. And having gone down to New York to go to school. So that was my dad's political position, coming from a military background, and at that time thinking that we were doing Southeast Asia a favor and the nation a favor by helping the country of Vietnam become an independent, self-determining country. And so my dad—you didn't have to ask him where he stood on issues like that. But I always had a good relationship with my dad.

Interviewer: Did he express an opinion when your brother joined the military?

DI: No, he was drafted. Back in that day and age, in the later sixties, we had about a hundred and forty, two hundred and forty-five body bags a week coming back. So it was a volatile time for young people, because in that year, you couldn't vote until you were twenty-one. But you could be drafted at eighteen and go and die. You could buy beer that year at age eighteen. And they turned it around—you can vote at eighteen, but you can't drink until you are twenty-one. The issue was, how many people for which reason? Drinking and driving, or military? But my dad

was always supportive. He did vote politically, carefully. He was always supportive of where the government stood on issues like that, including my brother.

Sample question prompts:

- In this story, we hear about a father and son with different political opinions. Did you and your parents see eye to eye on most issues, or did you have disagreements?
- Did you or anyone in your family go to war?
- The man telling this story was opposed to the Vietnam War. In what kinds of situations do you think America should take military action? (What's worth fighting for?)

8. John Dunlap

File Name: 9.Dunlap_Sponsoring_Refugees

Interviewed: 2015

Biographical Info: *John Dunlap was born in New Rochelle, New York in 1940. His dyslexia had a major impact on his education, and with the help of teachers he graduated from the Taft School and attended Johns Hopkins University. When the Vietnam War began, he joined the Air Force and became an officer. After serving for nearly five years, Dunlap came home to the United States but was unhappy with civilian life. He taught English in Laos and Indonesia before moving to Cooperstown, NY. In this story, he talks about how he and his wife Karen began sponsoring refugee families at their home in Cooperstown.*

John Dunlap [JD]: We agreed to sponsor some refugees from Laos and since I had lived in Laos and knew the native peoples there, not their language, but I knew them, they came to live with me. There were five kids and the mom. The father had been killed in the war. Eventually, they made some contacts with Hmong. Did I tell you they were Hmong? Well it's a group of mountain people in Laos. They located their leader, the chief, if you will, in the United States and then they moved out there. They have done very well. There were five kids, the mom died. All those kids are now U.S. citizens and have been for some years now. They got married and I lost contact with them. It happens all the time.

Interviewer: How does the church help refugees in Cooperstown?

JD: Well, they help them because they sponsor them. They sponsor them and the reason they got involved—well I think the reason that they got in on it, because I was kind of on a bandwagon for bringing some over [laughing]. I was willing to house them and they were very supportive, extremely supportive. I should tell you that it's not easy being a sponsor of refugees. We know that, because we have done it and I'm 75 now, so probably I should have given up this kind of thing, but I guess I can't really.

Sample question prompts:

- Have you ever been part of a charitable group or a community service project?
- This story is about refugees from Laos who were forced out by war. Do you know anyone who has had to leave their home for safety or for economic reasons?
- Do you think it's hard for people from other countries to adapt to life in America?

9. Ellen St. John

File Name: 10.St.John__The_Importance_of_Protesting

Interviewed: 2016

Biographical Info: *Ellen St. John was born in China, where her father worked at a university. She and her family moved to New York City in the 1940s and she has lived in the United States ever since. She became a nurse and moved to Cooperstown, NY to work in the hospital there. Every Wednesday, she takes part in an anti-war vigil outside the Cooperstown Post Office. In this story, she explains why protesting is important to her.*

Interviewer: Why do you think it's important to go out there week after week when you're protesting in Cooperstown?

Ellen St. John [ES]: I can't not speak out in a democracy. I don't think we're a democracy if we don't speak for what we believe is right, work for what is right and not just hide out. Otherwise we become just an oligarchy where the people in power have all the say.

Interviewer: What are the types of responses you've gotten in Cooperstown since doing these vigils outside the Post Office?

ES: Well, at first when we started vigiling we had many people who came and scoffed at us and called us unpatriotic. Some of them, there was one woman who actually spat on the sidewalk she was so angry that we weren't doing what the government wanted us to do. It's too bad that we think of patriotism as following everything the government tells you to do. We need to realize patriotism means trying to make your government your country as honorable and strong and friendly as any other country could be. To make it a peaceful country is, I think, patriotic. Occasionally people would come from across the street where the National Baseball Hall of Fame is, because in the summertime we have a lot of tourists, and sometimes from other countries. There was a Swedish family that came across the street to us because we carry signs and they said "What are you doing?" and we told them exactly what we were doing. "We didn't know that anybody would do this in your country. We must go back to Sweden and tell them there, there are people that don't like the war." It was funny.

Sample question prompts:

- Have you or your friends and family members ever been part of any political protests?
- Do you think protests are helpful or harmful?
- Would you say you've been an active part of democracy in the United States?