

## 10. Grace Ola Wiggins

By

Gary Wiggins

© 2018; revised 2021

There was a difference of about 10 ½ years in age between Dorman Elmo Wiggins and his sister Grace Ola (Aunt Sis). She was only 10 years old when Dorman entered the service, and they rarely saw each other during her teenage years. Her life experience during those critical years was quite different from his since she lived in a much larger town, Evansville, Indiana.



Grace Ola Wiggins High School Graduation Picture (?)

I believe that Aunt Sis graduated from Evansville Bosse High School around 1948. After high school, she attended Lockyear Business College, a very reputable old institution in Evansville. She was a member of Lockyear's Alpha Iota sorority in 1950, but she must have moved to Indianapolis shortly after that and was soon married to Marvin Price. A daughter, Sandra Kay Price, was born there in 1952. By 1953, the

Prices were living back in Evansville with Grandad and Mamaw Wiggins at 719 E. Oregon Street. The 1955 Indianapolis City Directory has Aunt Sis and Marvin again living in Indianapolis, but I think Grandad and Mamaw Wiggins had already assumed care of Sandy by that time. Grandad Wiggins had little respect for Marvin Price. Marvin dressed like a dandy and seemed not to possess much fondness for work. Claiming that he had severe back problems, he depended to a large degree on Aunt Sis and his in-laws for support.

Aunt Sis's marriage to Marvin Price did not last very long, probably aggravated by the unsettling realization that their daughter was not going to be a normal child. Whatever mental defect Sandy had, it left her practically dysfunctional. She never learned to talk, and as she grew older, she became more than Grandad and Mamaw Wiggins could handle. Ultimately, she was placed in the Muscatatuck Mental Hospital in Madison, Indiana around 1960.

In 1983/84, a dispute arose between Aunt Sis and the State of Indiana. Although the state had been satisfied up to that point with the Social Security disability payments based on Marvin Price's earnings, they suddenly re-classified the Muscatatuck State Hospital, where Sandra Price had lived since at least 1960, as a nursing home and demanded \$672 per month from Aunt Sis and Billy. The DeJarnetts were living in Kentucky at the time. A letter from Muscatatuck dated June 17, 1983 stated, "Since Sandra became incapable of indicating intent to live in Indiana before age 21, her residency will be determined to be that of your's (*sic*) since you are the parent and also legal guardian since 1974, which was filed in the State of Kentucky." Aunt Sis turned to me for assistance, since Marvin Price was apparently dead by that date (or could not be located), and I agreed to be Sandy's guardian. The guardianship was alleged to be necessary so Sandy could be put on Medicare and Medicaid. After much back and forth from us and consultation with a lawyer, the State of Indiana decided to pursue an agreement with the State of Kentucky that would allow Sandy to remain in Indiana without needing a guardian. On June 20, 1984, a "Notice and Certificate of Action: Medical Assistance" informed us that Sandy had been approved for medical assistance, with coverage retroactive to December 1, 1983. Sandy died March 9, 1998 three weeks shy of her 46<sup>th</sup> birthday.

My impression is that Dorman and Grace were never that close, either as children or adults. In fact, Aunt Sis told me that they didn't really get to know each other until later in life when she and Dad went off by themselves to a bar in St. Louis and talked for several hours. Grandad Wiggins was furious with them when they returned to Evansville. In a telling remark, Aunt Sis wrote about Dorman in a letter to me, "Mom hasn't heard from Bud lately, but guess 'no news is good news.' At least, it usually is with him."

Aunt Sis's second marriage of 42 years to Billy DeJarnett (also his second marriage) was much more successful and far more satisfying in many ways. Billy was an ironworker and a very good man. Like my construction electrician stepfather, he had to depend on the ups and downs of the construction industry, impacted by the weather at various times of the year or complicated by the economic fluctuations in the country. One of the boom times for Billy was around 1966 when they lived in Lemont, Illinois. He was working on a major construction site at Argonne National Laboratory, and they had a very nice new home that I visited in Lemont. Their daughter, Marilyn Jean DeJarnett (nicknamed "Tootie") was born in 1967.

It seems to me that the DeJarnetts' economic fortunes took a slow, but steady downturn after that. It may have been about this time that they returned to Evansville and were staying with Grandad and

Mamaw at 720 E. Columbia Street when I visited. They were waiting for a rental family to vacate the house that Grandad and Mamaw still owned at 719 E. Oregon Street, so they could move into it. It was sold to Aunt Sis and Billy in 1968. After Grandad Wiggins died in 1972, Mamaw stayed for a while in the E. Columbia Street house in Evansville, Indiana, but soon began to live with or close to the DeJarnetts in Kentucky. At one time Mamaw lived in a trailer behind their house near Basket, KY. They lived together in various places near and in Henderson, Kentucky. On Mamaw's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1988, they were in far western Kentucky at Wickliffe, Billy's hometown. Ironically, in 1993, the DeJarnetts found themselves in Evansville—but Evansville, Illinois, not Indiana—when Mamaw died there on November 24, 1993. By 2002, the DeJarnetts were in Smith Mills, Kentucky. Billy died in 2002, and Aunt Sis, in 2004.



Eura Wiggins and Gary Wiggins on her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday

A tragic story involving Billy was the result of a practical joke that some union buddies pulled on him. Billy became fixated on winning the Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes. One of his so-called friends apparently knew someone who worked for a TV station in Evansville. The jokers called the DeJarnett home and set a time when a TV news crew and the Publisher's Clearinghouse representatives could come to their home to make the presentation. I think they even showed up with a film crew to lend further credence to the joke. Finally, the ruse was revealed, but it was too much for Billy. It really pushed him over reality's edge, and he would always tell me when we visited about his plans for a big house after his money came.

For the most recent version (5/1/2021), see: <https://hoosierpewter.com/WBS/WBS-0010.pdf>