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## Dedication, Charles Malcolm Wilson '36

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## DEDICATION

### CHARLES MALCOLM WILSON '36

THE Fordham Prep Class of 1929 yearbook, under the picture of Charles Malcolm Wilson, said "How Far this Little Candle Throws its Beam."

How prescient of the yearbook editors of the Class of 1929, as they wrote of their 15-year-old classmate—still slight of build, intellectually acute, already a skilled debater, and, as the son of his Republican-district-leader, suffragette mother, already entertaining dreams of someday being "The Governor" (Remember, in his baby book, his mother wrote that his first words were "votes for women!").

As I sat last night trying to put together a few thoughts to share with you about my father, my mind raced as I considered the possibilities of how to begin. Perhaps with a few funny stories to make us all chuckle with remembered laughter—he had such a wealth of good stories and never had any trouble remembering the punch line. Maybe with a few examples of how this man of words, beautiful words always carefully chosen, was really a man of action, showing us all by what he did (as dad, grandpa, uncle, friend, colleague) how profoundly he understood the maxim that actions speak louder than words. Maybe with some of his accomplishments in public life—but no, the news writers and editorialists are doing that with remarkable depth and consistency, and besides, many of you gathered here really know so much more about his public accomplishments than his daughters, son-in-law, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews do; our vantage point was so different.

And then I really felt overwhelmed—but, as my father's daughter, I surely couldn't be at a loss for words! I was overwhelmed by the flood of memories recalled over the last three days. Overwhelmed, but grateful beyond telling.

The last several years were difficult ones, bringing enormous changes to my father's life. For all my life he was so much at the center of things; the smartest man in just about any room he was ever in; the man who always seemed to know what to do and how to do it to get things done; and the man who intuitively understood what many of us try so hard to learn about what is good, what is ethical, how to make the right choices.

But, all that changed, more and more markedly, over the last few

years, and it was sad for all of us who loved him to see. As his life became ever more limited, it became harder and harder to remember the greatness of the man.

But how wonderful the last three days have been. We could hardly call a wake for this beloved man, the last Wilson of his generation, a "fortuitous concatenation of felicitous circumstances." Remember—this was an Irishman's wake, (a teetotalling Irishman, it's true) during the week of St. Patrick, and for us, it came pretty close.

We who saw all those changes over these years felt washed by the love of the people who remembered this great man, despite his absence from the center of things, and who came, or called, or wrote to tell us of those memories. And what were those memories?:

"A man of his word"

"A gentleman"

"A loyal friend"

"A humble man"

Lawyers and secretaries, judges and bridge tenders, politicians and police officers, big people and little people, all using the same words—integrity, loyalty, and humility—to describe this man, words, any one of which, we would be happy to have someone use when speaking of us.

But what touched my sister Anne and me, and Jack Conroy, and my father's six grandsons, the most, I think, were the stories—the individual stories that people told us of our father. Not as assemblyman, lawyer, lieutenant governor, governor, or bank chairman, but simply as a kind, warm person who really cared about others. Here's what we heard, over and over:

Kathy and Anne, when my dad died, your father called my mother every six weeks just to be sure our family was okay;

When I was trying to decide what I wanted to do, your father spent over an hour hearing me out and providing excellent advice to this struggling college student;

Your father encouraged my interest in politics, even though he knew my heritage as a Democrat would prevail;

I have saved all the notes he wrote me—he answered every letter, and even though I could hardly read his writing, I treasure every word he wrote; or

Even, when I was out of a job, your father sent my family a check every three months, but told no one, and would not let me tell anyone either.

Those stories, by the hundreds—each with its own wrinkle, but all with the same theme—were stories of his individual kindnesses, done without fanfare, without votes in the balance, or earthly reward; those stories are what have brought us such joy. They have, as with a magic wand, erased so much of the recent past, and have restored to our memory of him the integrity rightly his. And those words people used over and over—integrity, loyalty, and humility—are all of a piece.

He could not be disloyal to his God, his Church, his party, his friends or his family, because he was in those days a whole person—he had integrity. He was humble, because for him it was simple—nothing is simpler than being who you are when you have integrity. That’s the key—integrity—oneness, wholeness. He was the same person, whether in his public life or his private life. Not for him, the remaking of his look (oh, those narrow ties) or his philosophy to suit the pollsters; not for him, that concept we hear talked about today as though it were a virtue, that concept so antithetical to integrity—the “ability to compartmentalize.” He would not even have grasped the concept, because he was who he was and could not imagine wanting to be any different.

So, picture it: one candle, perhaps little at 15, but growing strong and true, even farther, touching all in its path. Here in this Church today and for the last three days in McGrath’s funeral home, in the mail, in the newspapers from here to Washington, to Chicago and beyond, we have heard hundreds of tales of just how far that little candle threw its beam, in public and in private. I know for me, and I am sure for all of us, that beam will continue to burn brightly, calling us to try in some small way to reach the standard he set by simply being who he was—a whole person—loyal, loving, and true.

We are all grateful—I am grateful—to all of you for making so abundantly clear that all that Malcolm Wilson was is remembered.

*Katharine Wilson Conroy*

*Notes & Observations*