

Wilkerson, Annie Louise: A Life of My Own ^[1]

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Annie Louise Wilkerson: a life of my own

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) ^[2]," *News & Observer*. Published 3/13/2005. Copyrighted. Reprinted with permission.

I visited Dr. Annie Louise Wilkerson at her home in Raleigh. We had been planning on talking after she finished radiation therapy for a recurrence of cancer, but she called me up one night and said it wasn't going so well: I had better come now. Dr. Annie -- as her patients call her -- was Raleigh's first woman obstetrician/gynecologist, was Rex Hospital's first intern/resident and is a legend in her field. At 91, she has a deep faith and is as strong of mind and heart, if not body, as ever. We talked about her love of medicine and a lifetime of bringing children into this world.



Annie Louise Wilkerson. Photo by Chris Sewark, 2005. ~~To use this photo for further use or to purchase a print, please contact the News & Observer.~~

My name is Annie Louise Wilkerson and I was born in Apex in 1914. Apex had about 250 people and one block of stores back then. My dad was president of the bank, owned half the drugstore and practiced medicine. To this day, if I could be my family discouraged me, even my father. My dad told me that if I went into medicine, I'd come out Annie Louise Wilkerson as I went in, and I did. I said that's no problem. I married medicine. I married medicine like Judge Susie Sharp said. He said I wouldn't have a life of my own, and you don't. He said, "I'm not a really good daddy to you. I never have been, I never will be, because there is no way I can do it and practice medicine the way I do." Just like I couldn't. But if I had to I was determined that I was going to do it, and nobody was going to stop me, including my dad. I knew what I wanted and I was going to get it. I pioneered all my life. There were 72 in my class at the Medical College of Virginia and only four. Obstetrics is a wonderful field, and usually it's a happy field. Of course sometimes it isn't. When it isn't, it's the roughest in the world. There was higher mortality in those days. A mother had to prepare for birth, but also for death. That's right. When my father was in practice, you mostly went to the home. You had very few office patients. That was why I loved medicine. You knew what was going on. You knew the people. You knew the family, the community. My daddy even took the first delivery I ever saw my father do when I was a freshman in medical school. He was going to deliver her and I asked if I could go. So I went and I helped deliver it and the child was a girl. They named her my full name. She was born when I came along, people were just getting used to having babies in hospitals. Most still just stayed at home. They didn't go to the doctor. They felt that they went to the hospital to die. That's exactly what they thought. But many a woman I did home deliveries first, but I quit doing obstetrics at home in short order because I realized it was too much chance to take. There is no bigger emergency in the world than an obstetrical emergency. In the hospital, I was able to take care of my first delivery in practice was when I was a student. That was in a home. I stayed nearly 48 hours, but I was able to call back and forth to the hospital and report on the situation. Oh yes, I was anxious. That's only perfectly natural. But I had you didn't let the bad tear you down. It did affect people. It stopped people from doing obstetrics. If something bad happened, they couldn't take it. In fact, my dad told my sister, you are not going to study medicine because the first time you I have done over 8,000 deliveries. It never got old. There's no two alike. That sounds ridiculous, but it's true. And you don't ever get over being anxious. You do the very best that you can. That's all you can do. I've got a lot of children in this but I realize it is a different day, but I don't care how much we grow or how much we have or anything else, we must remember why we are doctors. Patients are not numbers or clients. If you are a patient, you are sick, you need help, and you are We need a change of heart. Lord, back when my father and I first practiced together, we were paid in chickens and vegetables and a little bit of everything. I know of one family I delivered four in the family and I've never been paid anything but That's the problem with medicine today. Doctors today are forced into thinking about medicine as more of a business and less of an art. I didn't know how fortunate I had been until I retired. Money didn't make a difference. My daddy was like that too. Sometimes patients owed him money and he'd swear he couldn't keep treating them. But they would get sick and call him in the middle of the night and he'd get up and go. That's the way to practice medicine.

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina :

Dr. Annie Louise Wilkerson lived from January 18, 1914- September 15, 2005.

"Obituary: Dr. Annie Louise Wilkerson." *News & Observer*, September 18, 2005.

Annie Louise Wilkerson, MD Nature Preserve Park. City of Raleigh, N.C. <https://www.raleighnc.gov/parks/content/ParksRec/Articles/Parks/AnnieWilkerson.html> ^[3]

Raleigh Hall of Fame, 2005 Inductees: <http://www.raleighhalloffame.org/inductees/2005-2> ^[4]

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