

Elizabeth Wilson Patterson



Elizabeth, the only daughter of John C. Wilson and Charlotte Gibson Wilson, was born in Atlantic City, NJ, on November 20, 1909. Soon after the family settled in Washington, DC, where she grew up. While Woodrow Wilson was president, a new acquaintance once asked Elizabeth if she lived in the White House, to which she responded, "No she lived in the brown house." The house on Woodley place was a three story town house on a

cul-de-sac overlooking a wooded area near Rock Creek Park. Elizabeth's aunt Margaret, who was 54 when Elizabeth was born, lived on the third floor. Elizabeth learned to play bridge at the age of seven so that she could be the fourth player with her parents and her aunt. Her aunt died when she was 14, but Elizabeth remained an avid bridge player for most of her life.

When Elizabeth was in the third grade, her father, who was 69 at the time, decided that she should be tutored at home rather than attend school. Elizabeth protested, as did her mother, but Mr. Wilson would not be dissuaded. Although she claims that it did not really affect her friendships with other children in the neighborhood who attended various different



Elizabeth was always a bit chagrined to have her place of birth listed as Atlantic City. She weighed in at 8¼ lbs. and 19 inches. Her Godparents were her aunt and uncle Mabel and Newman Chaffee.

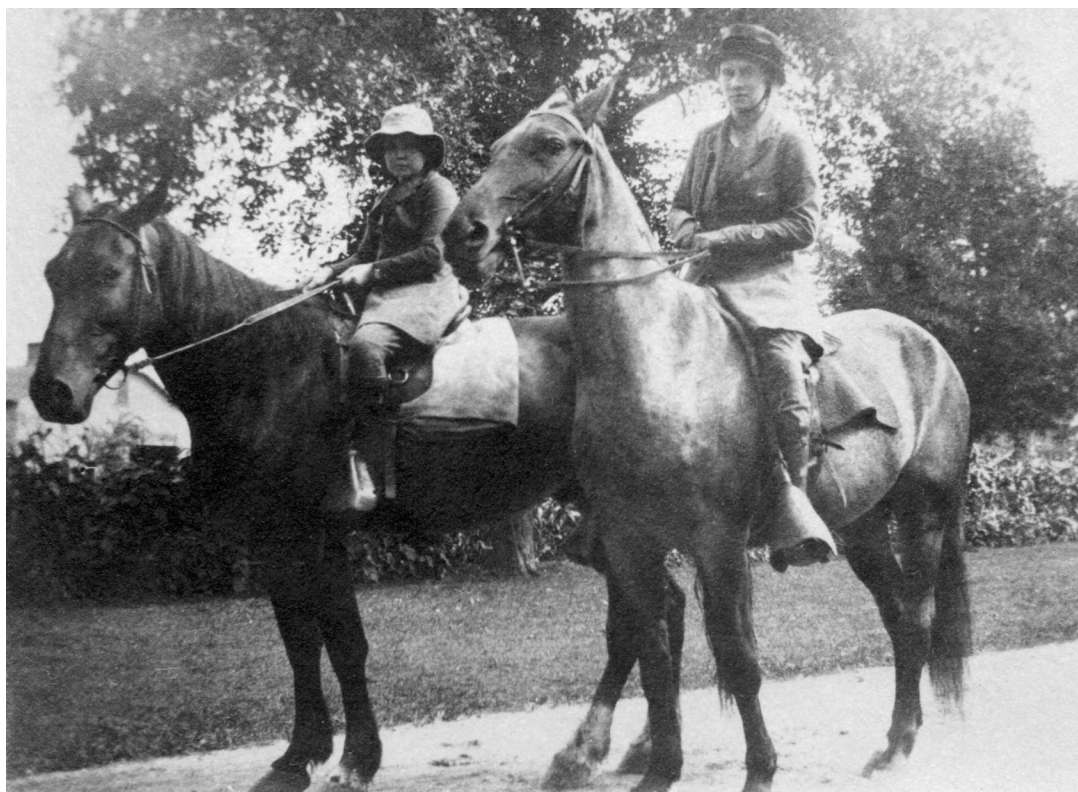




The back of the house on Woodley Place overlooking Rock Creek Park: Probably taken from the Connecticut Avenue Bridge

Elizabeth with her cousins Bob, Frances and Newman Chaffee and Frances's horse, Yankee, during one of the summers she spent in Rutland, Vermont:

Elizabeth enjoyed horseback riding and continued to ride as an adult when she had the opportunity. She also first learned to drive a car in Vermont. Her uncle Newman Chaffee was doubly related to her by virtue of his having married his own first cousin, Mabel Gibson.



Elizabeth in Brandon, Vt., with Mary Dunlap, a close friend of her mother who was an honorary aunt

Elizabeth well after her father relented and let her hair grow: Probably around the time he became appalled that she was not yet learning Latin in school and decided that she should be tutored at home



schools anyway, Elizabeth strongly resented being removed from school. When after the eighth grade her father finally relented, she was delighted to go to Western High School, even though it involved a 45 minute bus ride every morning.

During the summers Elizabeth would often visit her cousins in Vermont. Her Aunt Mabel and Uncle Newman Chaffee were also her

godparents and had three children, Frances, Bob and Newman who were more or less her age.

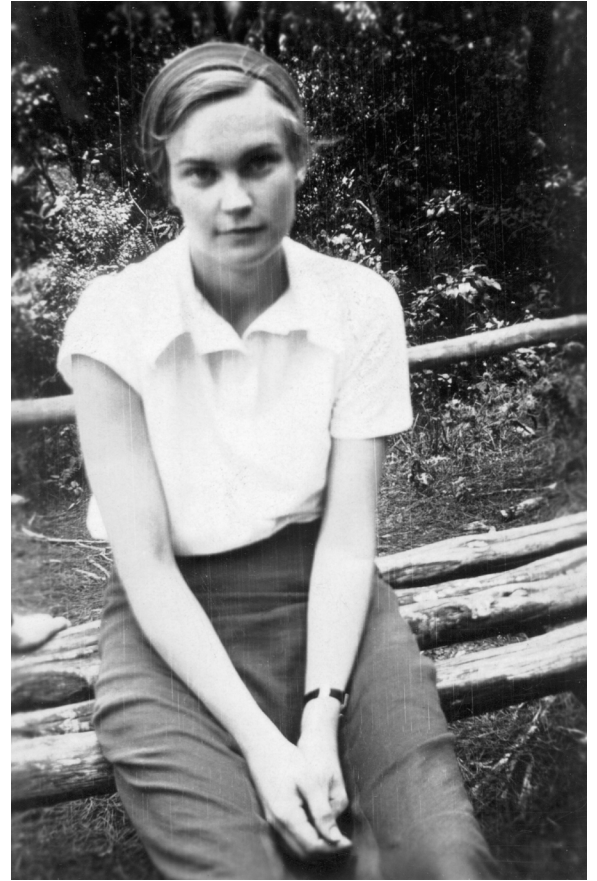
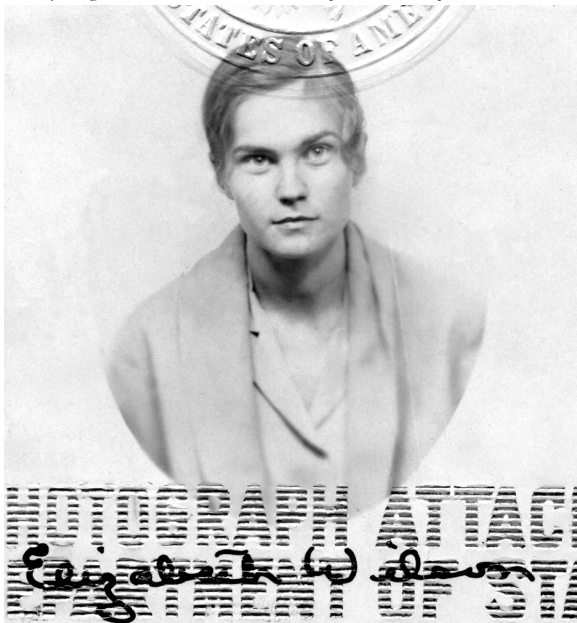
Elizabeth graduated from Western in June of 1926 and went to Bryn Mawr the following fall. She spent her junior year in France at the University of Nancy and the Sorbonne, and graduated from Bryn Mawr magna cum laude in 1930. During the summer after graduation she traveled in Europe with a

Bridal portrait taken in the living room of her home in Washington, December 1934



A stylish teenager probably around the time of her senior year in high school or freshman year in college

1930 passport photo of the Bryn Mawr graduate headed for Europe again with classmate Mary Hulse (Nyland)



Riding on the Santo Tomas Trail in April 1932 during her trip to Asia and the Philippines with her Mother

classmate.

Shortly after Elizabeth turned 21 her father died at the age of 83. She worked at a library in Washington, and then in 1932 she and her mother traveled to the Philippines, Japan and China. Her Aunt Bess lived in the Philippines.

On December 22, 1934, Elizabeth married George Patterson, whom she had met while he was a law student at George Washington University. He had taken a job the Department of the Interior doing legal work for the national parks, and their first home was in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Elizabeth immediately became pregnant; and, when their first son was born in Salt Lake City on September 26, 1935, her





The new family in front of their apartment in Salt Lake City 1935



Prior to the arrival of her first child Elizabeth had never seen, much less held, a newborn baby.



Their apartment in Salt Lake City

George and Elizabeth soon after their arrival in Salt Lake City 1935: Blame the cropping on the original photographer.

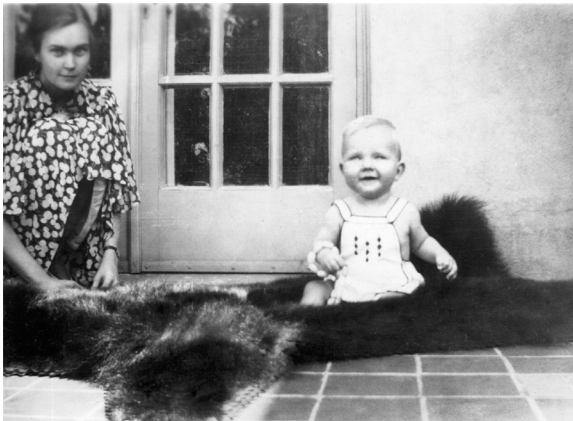


husband was in Butte, Montana. His work involved a good bit of travel, but Elizabeth's mother was able to come to Salt Lake to help. Within a year, George and Elizabeth decided to move back to Birmingham, Alabama. George was a member of the bar in Alabama and was able to begin a private law practice, presumably with some financial assistance from Elizabeth, who had already received a portion of her inheritance. (A 1936 filing for Alabama securities tax lists holdings with a value of just under \$100,000.)

A daughter, Charlotte, was born a day before their third anniversary in 1937. George and Elizabeth were renting a house on Arlington Avenue in Birmingham which required climbing



Henry, the Ford coupe which took the newlyweds across the country and back, parked in front of the house on Arlington Avenue in Birmingham



June 1936: Georgy Porgy enjoying one of their souvenirs from the Wild West



February, 1937: Explaining her camera technique on location in Washington D. C. as she directs an early episode in a long series of home movies





2432 Henrietta Road, the house which George and Elizabeth purchased in 1938 and again in 1971: Elizabeth lived there for a total of 49 years.

Two snapshots with Charlotte in the yard of the new house in 1938





On the porch with George, Dwight and Charlotte in 1941

numerous stairs to get to the front door, so they soon purchased the house at 2432 Henrietta Road where they spent most of the rest of their lives.

In February 1941 a third child, John Dwight, was born, followed 14 months later by a fourth, Richard Gibson. Even though her husband was denied a commission in the Navy (apparently due to suspicions of his liberal political connections), they were separated during most of the war by the fact that he accepted an appointment with the Office of Price Stabilization. He worked in Atlanta, Georgia, until 1947; but she stayed in the house in Birmingham with the family.

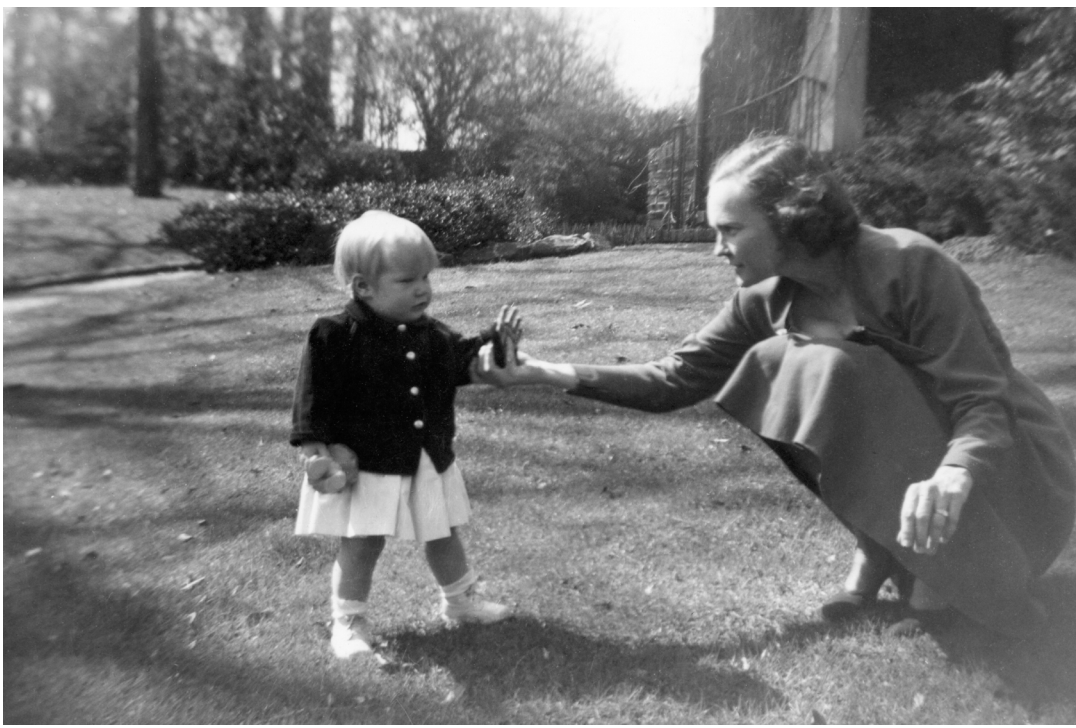
After the OPA was dismantled, George returned to Birmingham to practice law and run for first for Congress and then for County Commissioner.

In 1950 her mother died. While she had clearly had a complex relationship with her mother, "Gaga" had been a fondly regarded member of the family and source of support. The loss was difficult for Elizabeth, but she did inherit the remainder of her father's wealth. Her mother's will named her as sole heir, but Elizabeth distributed 25% of the net estate to relatives and close friends. Her inheritance gave her an income which was on a par with the income earned by her husband. While this had obvious advantages in terms of the family's lifestyle, it did not necessarily level the



Den Mother ca 1950: Just for the record her illustrious charges include George Barber, Bobby Colvin, Kingman Shelburne, two unknowns, Dwight, Richie and David Chapman.





Elizabeth was 43 when Betsy was born. George was at lunch when she called his office, so she drove herself to the hospital and hassled with admissions about her insurance coverage before being taken to the delivery room.

emotional playing field in a beneficial way with her husband.

When the OPA was resurrected as the Office of Price Stabilization in 1951, George once again became a regional director working in Atlanta for two years. Eventually in 1952 he was appointed the Alabama District Director for the Internal Revenue Service, and he was able to work in Birmingham for twelve years.

When a fifth child, Betsy, was born in 1953, a friend sent Elizabeth a telegram congratulating her on becoming a five star

Captured by Richie's new flash camera in 1953





Charlotte's wedding in June of 1958 with Paul, Margaret and Jim Halloran

general in the PTA. She herself began a summary of her life for a 50th college reunion by saying, "My last fifty years include thirty years of driving groups and PTA for five children..." She had a strong sense of obligation and was indeed active in the PTA as well as being a den mother for both cub scouts and girl scouts. She was an active member of the Women's Auxiliary at her church; and she did volunteer work for numerous organizations, including most notably the Planned Parenthood League.

Her children often wondered why someone who seemed so at odds with her role as mother would have five children, and she explained herself in a series of candid and revealing letters to Richard in 1964:

...The fact that I don't find babies thrillingly stimulating sole companions doesn't mean I am opposed to having them. They turn into people. I think ladies who strike a pose of motherhood rampant and go on about their utter absorption in the rites of diaper changing etc. are hypocrites and liars.

...I will now give you my views, in capsule form, of the kind of love that justifies marriage — in reply to popular demand as expressed in your last letter. A basic ingredient is feeling completely at ease with each other. See-sawing from romantic heights to depths of doubt and back is not satisfactory. It is essential to like the person as well as love him or her, and it is a good thing to share some common interests. Another important factor is wanting to get

Although she would have scoffed at the suggestion that she was a musician of any sort, she never gave up playing the piano for her own amusement and attending performances by the Birmingham symphony and touring opera companies may have been among her greatest pleasures.



Family trio—Family groups predominated at both performances of the Metropolitan. George Patterson escorted daughter Charlotte and his wife to last night's presentation of "LaBoheme." Mrs. Patterson attended the matinee performance also.



Relaxing with Olive at Lake Martin



Enjoying a Chesterfield in 1959 before she gave up smoking for Lent one year and never smoked again



Clowning for a photo op celebrating Richard's return from the wheat harvest of 1960 with an excess of facial hair

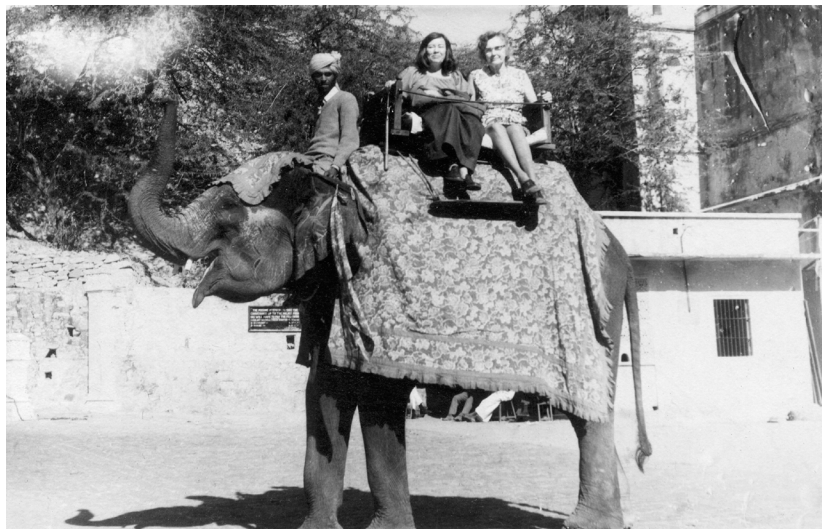


Kicking up her heels at Richard's wedding in 1968



Her 1965 passport photo

Riding is style during a visit with George and Patty in India





married, from an abstract consideration of the relative merits of single and family life. It is not necessarily soothing to the bride — in fact it is apt to ruffle her vanity — to hold forth on the theme of founding a family for the sake of posterity, but it really is a significant factor in a man's desire to get married.

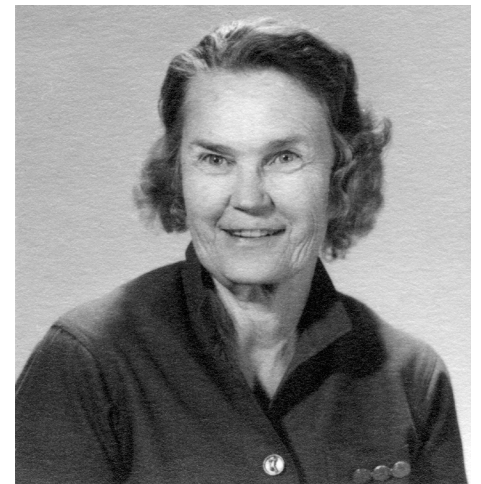
When Charlotte became old enough, Elizabeth went horseback riding with her. She tried her hand at golf and tennis, but her main source of pleasure was bridge. She almost always had a weekly bridge game with three other women who might change over the years but were surely her closest friends. Bridge was

Enjoying her role as Proud Mama at Betsy's debut.



A gathering of the clan in 1972

Olive, Wilson and Myrtice join a Birmingham reunion in 1977.



A passport picture from 1970

Visiting Judith, Tristan and Richard in Los Angeles in 1978





Touring Greece with Patty and George in the Spring of 1982



Elizabeth at a reunion with her cousins Bob Chaffee (4th from left) and Frances Chaffee Lewis (standing, 8th from left)

also a social activity which she enjoyed with her husband.

In 1964 the Internal Revenue Service transferred George to Phoenix, Arizona. This time she went with him, taking Betsy who was 11. As much as she may have been at odds with many aspects of the South, she had lived in Birmingham for almost 30 years and regarded it as her home. She had good friends there, and the move to Phoenix was an upheaval. She found much to dislike in Phoenix, but eventually got involved as she had in Birmingham. One of her favorite activities was her work with the art museum.

In 1971 when her husband retired, he

A partial family reunion in Birmingham in 1980: Charlotte, Elizabeth, Harriet, Dwight, Peggy, Elizabeth, Gibby, Judith, Richard, Tristan, Liza, Vince and Kevin



Touring Italy with George and Patty in 1980

Visiting with Dwight, Dwight, Jr., Harriet and Elizabeth





Flanked by Catherine and Nicholas Patterson as she celebrates her 90th birthday

learned that their old house in Birmingham was on the market again. He snapped it up, and they moved back to Birmingham. Elizabeth continued to live in the house after George died in 1979, but in 1994 she was finally persuaded to sell the house and move to Cincinnati so she could live in a retirement home near her daughter Charlotte.

In the summary for her college reunion she also says, "Traveling has been one of my greatest pleasures." She is probably not referring to the vacation trips in which she drove from Alabama to Vermont or California with a car full of children; but after her children had left the nest, she was able to resume traveling abroad. She went to Europe to visit her sons, Dwight and Richard, in 1965, and again in 1970 to visit her son, George, in Vienna. She and George also toured Scandinavia with Betsy in 1973. In 1975 she went to India to visit George and then returned to Europe again in 1978 and 1982.

Elizabeth Patterson and Elizabeth Patterson compare notes.



Elizabeth visiting with her longtime Birmingham friend, Lucille McDowell

Relaxing in the living room shortly before she sold the house on Henrietta Road and moved to Cincinnati

