

E. Raymond Wilson - Summary of Life:

Born on a farm in Iowa in 1896, Raymond Wilson received two degrees in animal husbandry from what is now Iowa State University. Intending to become a foreign missionary, he also studied at Columbia University, where he came in contact with the legendary socialist leader Norman Thomas. He received an MS degree in religious education from Columbia University in 1925.

After helping to found the Committee on Militarism in Education, he studied and toured for a year (1926-1927) in Japan under a Japanese Brotherhood Scholarship. He also traveled to China and the Soviet Union. He later traveled to Africa and attended and organized international conferences and study groups on disarmament, militarism and education.

From 1931 to 1943, he was Field and Education Secretary for the Peace Section of the American Friends Service Committee. He also served as co-chair of the Disarmament Working Group of the Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy.

Often called the "dean of Washington religious lobbyists," E. Raymond Wilson was one of the founders and served as the Executive Secretary of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, from its establishment in November 1943 until he became Executive Secretary Emeritus in January 1962.

As head of what could be considered the lobbying arm of the Society of Friends, he presented his organization's views on legislation dealing with foreign policy, world hunger, disarmament, civil rights and liberties.

He wrote two books. "Uphill for Peace," which was published in 1975, reviewed his organization's work in such areas as its opposition to the war in Vietnam and to the world arms race and universal military training bills, as well as the lobbying committee's work as a spokesman for such groups as blacks, American Indians, Japanese Americans and the hungry. His other book was his 1976 autobiography, "Thus Far on My Journey."

Over the years, Mr. Wilson told reporters that his goal was a world without wars, without walls and without want. He also was fond of saying, "You can't win a war any more than you can win a fire."

Wilson was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree by Haverford College in 1958, and a Doctor of Human Letters degree by Swarthmore College in 1975.

If he was never entirely successful in gaining the world he wanted, he continued to fight for it, in his own nonviolent way, into the 1980's.

He died June 27 1987 at Sandy Spring Friends House at age 90. He had congestive heart failure and pneumonia. His wife, the former Miriam Davidson, died in 1965. At the time of his death, survivors included two sons, Kent, of Del Mar, Calif., and Lee, of Washington, and four grandchildren.

A blog/story from an FCNL staff member, Jim Cason, in 2009

E. Raymond Takes Flowers to Congress

I remember hearing stories of FCNL's first Executive Secretary E. Raymond Wilson taking flowers to members of Congress since almost the first day that I started working here. So when we at FCNL saw the health care debate in this country descending into shouting and insults, flowers seemed like a natural response.

Did Raymond really take flowers to members of Congress? "Yes," say the members of our committee who worked with him in that period, or heard stories passed down over the years.

I've read several of his books and his life provides inspiration and hope for me. The image I have in my mind is of this well-dressed man with a handful of flowers going from office to office on Capitol Hill handing a stem to each of the offices he visits. I'm planning to buy a few stems today and the possibilities in an era of flower deliveries are endless.

Topics for Discussion:

1. *"Why try to work uphill for peace, justice and freedom on Capitol Hill at a time when cynicism about the character and operation of government and government officials is widespread, and when disillusionment about the church and organized religion is so common and so vocal? Because religion should be vital and relevant and because the health and future of democracy rest upon responsible participation by informed and concerned citizens.*

A world without war, without conscription and militarism has still to be achieved. Even in the United States, the price of liberty is still eternal vigilance. The battle for justice is never-ending. A world dominated by military, economic and political power easily forgets fairness and compassion for the disadvantaged and dispossessed at home and abroad."

E. Raymond Wilson, from the introduction to the book "Uphill for Peace" 1975

2. *"Quakers have been engaged in lobbying – that is to say in seeking to influence legislators by personal visits – ever since 1659 . . . The weightiest Friends in England including George Fox and William Penn, busied themselves buttonholing members of Parliament and appearing at committee meetings. The Yearly Meeting even rented a room in a coffee house hard by the Houses of Parliament for a headquarters – a kind of Friends Committee on National Legislation Office. . .*

The legislative struggle for religious liberty was substantially won in 1659 with the passage of the great Toleration Act, but the lobbying efforts went on, until Friends were finally granted the right to substitute a simple affirmation for a formal oath in 1722. From time to time in the course of this campaign, the Meeting for sufferings urged Friends to write their Parliament-men on the subject. If anyone thinks the techniques of the FMCS are a modern innovation, he knows little of Quaker history."

Frederick B. Tolles, the Ward Lecture, Guildford College, NC 1956

Possible Questions for Discussion:

Is it worth our time to lobby Congress with regard to our Quaker beliefs?

How do we choose which Quaker beliefs to lobby about - or should we lobby for them all?

How can we best support the efforts of the FCNL?

3. Raymond Wilson had strong views on capital punishment as well as on the use of military force. From his book, "Uphill for Peace," he wrote:

"One night while riding on the train between New York City and Washington, I struck up a conversation with someone in the seat in front of me. He had been reading a religious magazine containing articles defending war and capital punishment. When I asked him if his mind were made up on these two issues, he replied 'No.' I replied: I would like to leave two questions for you to answer in due time.

In regard to war, do you know any Christian way to kill a man?

As for capital punishment, do you know anybody wise enough to play God and take another's life?"

4. Some possible goals that Raymond Wilson discussed in his book:

During the last twenty years, spokesmen for our government have set forth goals that are far from accomplished but which we must work toward with determination. . . .

a. One goal toward which little relative progress has been made is to insure the world's population – still exploding at an ominous rate – an adequate diet. Much of the technology of food production and family limitation is known. But the political, social and personal will to use those techniques has been weak.

b. A second goal in the United States has been for all individuals to have access to as much education as they can benefit from and will need for using their God-given abilities. Is the wisdom exercised by the American people equivalent to the sum of their knowledge and their power in the world?

c. A third goal is to eliminate discrimination because of race, creed, sex or color. . . .

d. The fourth goal is the elimination of dire involuntary poverty which could be erased by a series of measures including an assured minimum income.

He indicates that we have the opportunity to participate in the democratic process to try to achieve these goals:

An important opportunity in our democracy is that there are so many places where the concerned citizen can share in the democratic process – citizen discussion and action at the precinct and county level, participation in political party activities, and voting at election

time after studying the records of the candidates. The individual citizen or organized group can send letters to members of Congress, or to the President or to those in administrative positions. He can visit members of Congress in their districts or in Washington. He can testify before Congressional Committees and can participate actively in public interest lobbies like the FCNL. But if democracy is to work satisfactorily, citizens must pay the price to make it function.

Do you agree with these goals?

Do you agree with the methods he suggests, above?

Other ways to participate in the democratic process to achieve those goals?

What should be our role as Quakers with regard to the above?