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Life with Little Willie

Life with Little Willie. The Japanese raid on Santa Monica. Toy drums and wild Indians. The very fine host Mr. Hearst, not socially minded. He knew the whole beginning of life, and wrote to no one else but me.

MD: During World War II, I was a major in the California [State] Guards, and I used to go to the hospital [the Marion Davies War Work Hospital, formerly the Marion Davies Children's Clinic in Sawtelle, West Los Angeles] and we'd have review. I was at the beach house when we had the raid [on Wednesday, February 25, 1942]. We thought it was the Japanese, and the [anti-aircraft] guns were going like mad. I was having a dinner party. All the lights in the house went out, and I jumped under the table. I crawled on all fours and tried to turn on the lights, and my own watchman rushed in and said, "Turn out those lights!" He brutalized me. "There's a raid going on—the Japanese are attacking us."

W.R. was up on the upper top balcony [the third floor] of the beach house watching the raid. Bullets were going over his head, shells were flashing like mad, and you never heard so many guns in your life. It lasted for half an hour. People were fainting.

There was firing all up and down the whole coast. I heard that two Japanese planes were shot down.

Well, it was terrible.

PP/KSM: *The guns of Santa Monica were fired one night early in 1942 at an unidentified plane. But the plane was not shot down. Californians had been anticipating an enemy attack for quite some time after Pearl Harbor, and air raid wardens patrolled the streets—ordering lights out and citizens in.*

TC: W.R. and Marion had gone from Wyntoon to Santa Monica in January 1942 for the sake of the War Work Hospital. They made a second trip to the Southland in late February and were coincidentally on hand for the so-called Battle of Los Angeles, a mysterious, poorly explained event ever since in the annals of World War II. See *Hearst and Marion: The Santa Monica Connection*, pp. 445-446.

Under the same date (2010), Terrenz Sword has helpfully offered *The Battle of Los Angeles, 1942: "The Mystery Air Raid"* (Privately Published).

MD: W.R. would send long letters to his editors and publishers. He liked to write more than he liked to dictate, so many times he sent them letters in his own handwriting.

His eyes were perfect. He didn't use glasses. I wished I had his control of the English language, not flowery but positive, and the strength of the words he used, and the expressions and the anecdotes he put in parentheses, like: (This reminds me of when I was a little boy and I picked up a book and I saw something that I thought was funny and I found it wasn't.) Like that, he would give them [his recipients] a little dig.

TC: Dr. Erich Salomon's photographs of San Simeon, taken in 1929, include one of Hearst in the Assembly Room, wearing eye glasses while working on a clipboard of notes. The Salomon photos illustrated the feature on San Simeon, "Hearst at Home," that appeared in *Fortune* magazine in May 1931.

MD: W.R. didn't care for radio or television. Every once in a while, when he would read the *New Yorker* he'd laugh and say, "Isn't that funny?"

He would read the magazines and the papers [his own and certain others]. I used to say that having all the papers and magazines around the house created cockroaches—that was an old thing my mother had believed. But W.R. was absorbed in them. He knew radio and TV were the coming thing, but he was a newspaperman, and for him, naturally, the printed word was most important.

W.R. found a cartoonist in *Esquire* [not a Hearst magazine then] that he wanted. He thought the man was brilliant, and he got him for

the editorial page. His cartoons ran in the *Examiner* [Los Angeles or San Francisco, possibly both], usually at the top of the page, after Mr. Hearst got him a contract.

He [the cartoon character] was a little bit of a fat fellow, and his wife was very skinny and blonde and dumb-looking. Like most blondes are.

I was no exception to the rule.

W.R. was a very fine host, but he was not socially minded. He would greet the people, then he would disappear. He would go to the architect's office [at San Simeon or Wyntoon], or maybe he would work on his editorials.

He would pay no attention to the guests, except at mealtimes, when he would be very polite, and then he would disappear again. That was probably the best way for a host to be. It made the guests feel at home. They could wander around and do what they wanted.

The place cards were always down before W.R. came to the table. We would all go in and sit down, and he'd listen to the discussions, but wouldn't say much. Looking at him, you would say he was not even listening, but he was. Still, it was like water off a duck's back; it meant nothing. He generally was thinking of something else.

He gave toasts only on special occasions. He never wanted to make a speech on his birthday [April 29], but they'd all scream for him to say something. He would say only one or two words, and sit down.

He'd always drink a toast to me, which I thought was kind of cute. He wasn't one to make speeches, and when he had to do two or three radio broadcasts, I never saw a man so nervous in my life.

TC: W.R. made more than just two or three broadcasts, but the exact number is unknown.

MD: One time he had to do one on politics. They set up the things in the office, and we were all in a jovial mood. We had had a little champagne. When W.R. was nervous, he had a little quiver in his voice. His face would get kind of pale and he'd be nervous for about a minute. Then he'd get himself under control.

His throat used to bother him, and he had an operation in Cleveland, about 1940 [or rather in October 1932]. His diverticulum had to be operated on. First they string it out and then they chop it off. It was a very serious operation, and after we got back home, it bothered him again. They thought they'd operate again, but it went away. It did affect his speech a bit; afterwards he spoke much better. Then he got his voice down to a very even level, and the broadcasts sounded fine.

He used to like to read historical books, like Thackeray and Dickens. He liked Dickens very much. W.R. had an immense amount of feeling inside. He was very emotional, but not outwardly. Very few people understood this.

He'd stay up all night long writing his article, the column, "In the News" [from February 1940 at San Simeon to May 1942 at Wyntoon]. He'd sleep in the morning, after he had breakfast. We'd have luncheon and dinner together.

I was sewing for the Army and the Navy, making hospital shirts and masks. It was loads of fun. I wonder why we didn't get any complaints from the hospital saying, "This seam is wrong."

MD: Everyone wanted to go up to Wyntoon because they thought it was a place for protection. Little did they know there was a Japanese camp [Tule Lake] less than fifty miles away. And it [Wyntoon] was right in line from Seattle to Los Angeles, so if the Russians had wanted to come, it was on their way. They'd get to Wyntoon before they got to Beverly Hills.

But there was an influx of people all the time. Coming in for a day or two and staying quite a while [instead]. You know the kind. So we had a little family, maybe five hundred people there, possibly more.

TC: Marion surely couldn't have meant five hundred people all at once, staff included; if she did, she was exaggerating greatly.

MD: W.R. didn't feel that he was being taken advantage of. He used to get a little bored occasionally, but he liked of have a lot of

people around him, up until the last five or six years [of his life, from about 1945 onward]. Then they made him nervous. I said, "Well, it's just like eating too much cake. You get fed up with a lot of people all the time, and then you want to quiet down. If you don't, your system's ruined."

After that we led a nice quiet life.

TC: By 1945 W.R. and Marion were living at San Simeon and, as of 1947, in Beverly Hills. They weren't at Wyntoon again after moving from there to San Simeon in November 1944.

MD: He was concerned about the families at Wyntoon that were working in the lumber mill there [in the nearby town of McCloud]. He used to try to inspect the places, and every Sunday he had all the youngsters over for a barbecue.

I'd have to sit back and wait until they got fed and went swimming. There was an orchestra for them on the tennis court. I'd just have to step into the background and watch.

TC: In 1944 the bandleader Glenn Miller attended W.R.'s birthday at Wyntoon, when the latter turned eighty-one—his last birthday celebrated there. Evidently Miller traveled solo for the event, without his musicians in tow. But Miller had played at the Military Ball in Hollywood in April 1942, at which Marion appeared in her State Guard uniform and Hearst in a tuxedo. *Hearst and Marion*, pp. 461, 471, 509.

MD: My tongue was hanging out for food, and all those little brats would come first and eat it. I was a great humanitarian. I wanted to grab a hamburger out of somebody's hand.

They had hot dogs and Spanish beans and tortillas and frijoles and enchiladas and chicken wings. I used to be hungry because sometimes my luncheon would be my breakfast, too.

It was the same routine every Sunday. They'd stay the whole afternoon. They would have to leave about six o'clock; and I could hardly wait. The place would be a mess, and it would take a day or so to get it cleaned up.

W.R. took great pleasure in seeing other people having a good time. I think he felt he ought to get some people in who might appreciate things. He saw to it that the children always got some sort of toy before they left.

The toy drums almost drove me crazy. He didn't care about the money. If there were five thousand, it didn't make any difference. He just had that feeling that children have to have a break in life.

And they broke everything. They broke the springboard [at the pool] one day. They'd get like little wild Indians and destroy everything. But W.R. couldn't see that side. He never complained.

Of course it was only during the good weather. In the winter nobody could get through. The snow was piled high and we couldn't get out.

TC: After W.R. and Marion returned to Wyntoon from Los Angeles in May 1943 (having been gone since the first of December 1942), they stayed at that northern estate, virtually without interruption, until November 1944. It was their longest stay of all the protracted ones made from 1933 onward.

MD: You might think W.R. did not have a good childhood—but he had a wonderful childhood.

Oh, maybe he didn't have that kind of fun when he was young. Maybe he was taken to too many antique galleries [for instance, in 1873–1874] and did too much studying. But his mother and father were crazy about him.

W.R. told me a story about when he was young [1878–1879, during which he turned sixteen] and his mother decided to take him to Paris to live in a pension [a small hotel]. She wanted him to learn French.

He had gotten hold of a gun somewhere, and he shot at the ceiling. The chandelier came crashing down. The "mama" of the pension said to Mrs. Hearst, "I think you'd better take your son away from here, because he has just shot the ceiling out." So then they called him Little Willie, the bad boy. But all little boys are full of mischief.

PP/KSM: *W.R. wrote about Little Willie in his [news]papers [in "In the News"] on several occasions. One example that graced a page read:*

When Willie was a little boy,
Not more than five or six,
Right constantly he did annoy
His mother with his tricks.
Yet not a picayune [a whit] cared I
For what he did or said,
Unless, as happened frequently,
The rascal wet the bed.

MD: He used to tell me these stories about himself. He enjoyed retelling them.

There was the time when he burned his arm on becoming a member of the Harvard *Lampoon* staff [in 1884]. He had five little cigar marks for his initiation.

But he didn't talk very much about Harvard. There were many stories about the fact that he didn't graduate from Harvard, but they were not true.

PP/KSM: *W.R. attended Harvard University from 1882 to 1885. He was dismissed from studies and had no academic degree until he was sixty-four years old [1927]. Then Ogelthorpe University in Atlanta conferred upon him an honorary Doctorate of Laws. He, in turn, conferred upon Ogelthorpe $100,000 and some four hundred acres of land.*

TC: W.R.'s baccalaureate address for his LL.D. degree in 1927 was entitled "Original Proposal for Anglo-American Understanding."

MD: For example [among the stories], the one about the pink satin slipper that was planted in front of his room. But the reason he left Harvard was that, from his work on the *Lampoon,* he got excited about the newspaper business. He didn't want to go to school any longer; he wanted to become a newspaperman. He asked his father if he could have the San Francisco *Examiner.* That was the only newspaper his father owned that was no good. His father must have thought he was crazy, but he gave it to him and told him, "Go to work on it." Well, it got to be the best one of all the papers.

TC: In the 1880s George Hearst owned no other newspaper besides the *San Francisco Examiner*. At this stage in Marion's memoir, in the 1940s, the *Los Angeles Examiner* was more a standard-bearer for W.R. than was its counterpart in San Francisco.

MD: One time W.R. was up for Mayor of New York and they threw the ballots in the Hudson River. He was very young [forty-two at the time], and he said that it must have looked like he was going to win, because they took wagons and trucks and threw all the ballots in the river.

But that was long before my time. And he didn't go into any politics while I knew him.

PP/KSM: *W.R. was elected to the U.S. Congress [from Manhattan] twice, in 1903 and 1907 [or rather in 1902 and 1904]. He ran for Mayor of New York City in 1905, but he lost in a close election that was contested for irregularities. He was a candidate for Governor of New York in 1906 on the [fusion] ticket of the Independent League and the Democratic Party, but he lost in another close count. He had hoped to run for president in 1908 but didn't. His last effort for political office was his second try for Mayor of New York City, in 1909, on the Independent League's ticket.*

TC: W.R. was also the Independent League candidate for Lieutenant Governor of New York in 1910.

MD: I asked him once about the pro-German thing [during World War I], and he said that his wife gave a party for the German Ambassador [Count von Bernstorff]. From that, he got the reputation of being pro-German. He was always pro-American, but his wife might not have realized that she might be entertaining the wrong people.

In the last part of the war [World War II], I started staying up most of the nights and sleeping most of the days. W.R. was working on his column [up until May 1942], and practically the whole night long he'd be up in his rooms [in the Bear House], writing.

It would be broad daylight when he finished working, and we'd go look at the river. It was a beautiful place.

PP/KSM: *Marion was known at times to refer to Wyntoon as Spittoon.*

TC: That dismissive term can be traced to one source alone: an uncredited passage in W. A. Swanberg's *Citizen Hearst* of 1961, p. 501. "Miss Davies, hating Wyntoon, had a scornful name for it"—whereupon Swanberg put "Spittoon" into lasting but doubtful orbit. Some of Marion's own words, as recorded in 1951 (and never at Swanberg's disposal), give a distinctly contrary impression. "Our happiest times, I think, were at Wyntoon," she said in *The Times We Had;* Chapter 12, p. 4, in this newer annotated version. Nonetheless, the "beautiful place" she spoke of in the current Chapter 13 is what prompted Pfau and Marx to mention Spittoon. Those two editors, youthful in 1975, would very likely assess and portray things differently now.

MD: We didn't talk about his column. I never knew what he was writing about from one minute to another. I don't think he knew either until he got himself closeted up.

Once in a while we'd talk about the circulation of a paper. He'd ask me which cartoon I liked best, or what did I think about the editorials, or if there was enough news [versus features].

At Wyntoon we got the San Francisco papers, the [Hearst evening] *Call-Bulletin* and the *Chronicle* [the de Young morning paper]. The *Chronicle* was never as good as the San Francisco *Examiner* [the Hearst morning paper], which was the best paper of all.

He knew the names and subject of anything I'd bring up. He'd say, "Let me get you a good book on that." I often wondered where he got that knowledge, because I'd never seen him read a book.

You could ask him any question about ancient history, about the Greeks or the Gauls, or the neolithic or paleolithic period, and he'd rattle it off, just like that.

He knew the history of every great emperor; he knew the whole beginning of life, from the oceans and the fish. He must have read before he knew me; I never saw him read. He was always writing.

He could interpret any Greek or Latin word, and he knew French and Italian and Spanish, and he could speak the languages as well as read them. I used to wonder where he got all that knowledge.

TC: Incoming foreign-language messages in the Hearst San Simeon Papers and in the George & Rosalie Hearst Collection are often accompanied by translations.

MD: He worked the crossword puzzles [in the newspapers] because he loved them, and he played solitaire because he said it gave him time for relaxation.

W.R. used to dictate correspondence. It would be typed up and he'd sign it. He wrote little notes to me every day. He would shove them under the door and wait until I woke up. He wouldn't allow anyone in the house to wake me up. I was spoiled.

He wrote to no one else [in cursive]. Not his lawyers or editors or his sons. They got either a telegram or a typewritten letter. He hadn't written or talked to his wife for at least twenty-five years. She never wrote to him, either. There was no feeling, nothing. They were separated and never saw each other. Hers was café society and his was different.

TC: The William Randolph Hearst Papers at The Bancroft Library as well as other collections of Hearst documents put the lie to Marion's statement that W.R. "wrote to no one else," even if a specifically handwritten form is the intended meaning. As to his and Millicent Hearst's relationship after the 1920s, see *Hearst and Marion*, pp. 9-12.

A telegram that W.R. sent his wife on October 11, 1930, warrants quoting here; it concerns their oldest son, George, who was then twenty-six:

"The young man met me at Williams [Arizona]. He looks extremely well. He says he is in strict training [to lose weight]. He wants to get job East, preferably Washington. He expects to be divorced [from Blanche Wilbur] and would like it over soon as possible. I think if divorced he will marry the other [Lorna Velie]. What do you think should be done? He admits the girl has great influence over him, but maintains it is exercised for his benefit, while his home life only made his faults worse. I asked him about children [the twins George, Jr., and Phoebe]. He hopes to have them part of time. He may not remarry as I think he will, but he says he is determined not to return to family. The question is whether wife should let matter drag along with slight hope of his return, or divorce him and let him take his own way."

Hearst signed his message "Pop." (G&RH)

Mrs. Hearst responded three days later, on October 14, 1930, with a wire of her own:

"Received your telegram and have been thinking seriously about it. My suggestion is that you try to induce her [Blanche] to get legal separation until this passes away from him. This is their only salvation and only hope of ever bringing them together. Trust you are feeling well again. Advise your not doing too much. Heard from boys [the twins David and Randolph, soon to be fifteen] at school. They are well. Had a little fright about Randolph who was ill but he is all right now."

She signed her message "Millicent." (G&RH)

George and Blanche chose to divorce, and he went on to marry Lorna, who herself had a daughter from a former marriage. This second marriage for both of them ended in divorce. George married four more times. His last wife, Rosalie Wynn, proved a congenial partner, and they remained married until George's death in 1972.

MD: [regarding W.R.'s "little notes," as on p. 10] I used to answer him back. He used to keep all my little notes in a drawer right next to his bed. But they were stolen from the house.

I still have his.

PP/KSM: *A fragment of one such note read:*

Oh the night is blue and the
stars are bright
Like the eyes of the girl of
whom I write.
And the day is a glimmer of
golden light
Like the locks of the girl of
whom I write.
And the skies are soft and the
clouds are white
Like the limbs of the girl
of whom I write,
But no beauty of earth is so
fair a sight
As the girl who lies by my
side at night.