

Library of Congress

[The Wade Family]

26097 Life Couch - History [Miami?] - The Wade Family [Dorothy?] Wood

FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT

Miami, Florida

3,000 Words

January 20, 1939

The Roof Family(White)

232 N. W. 30th St.

Miami, Florida

Stenographer

Dorothy Wood,

Writer

THE WADE FAMILY

Set far back from the street in a quiet residential section of Miami [is?] a garage apartment, occupied by a family of three. Around the garage, large enough to accommodate four cars, a few crotons and hibiscus have been planted. A clothesline has been placed at the right of the drive-way leading to the garage. In the small yard and drive-way there are usually three or four cars parked, and always several little children playing. The stairs are somewhat steep, and jut out under the ceiling which forms a narrow hall-way between the

Library of Congress

two apartments upstairs, necessitating [care?] on the part of one ascending the stairs not to bump his head.

I knocked on the door at my left, and was asked to enter by Marjory, a pretty-bright-eyed, blonde little girl. There are only two rooms in the apartment occupied by the Wade family. As I open the front door, I enter a living-bedroom. In one corner is a double iron bed, placed between two windows at which hang plain white [muslin?] curtains, trimmed with borders of red checked gingham. A small table with a cheap table-lamp on it occupies the center of the room. Just behind, and to the right of the front door, stands a 2 small iron cot, on which six year old Marjory sleeps. The room also contains a large closet, and an old-fashioned dresser, painted green, in which the family wearing apparel to kept. A wicker settee, also painted green to match the table and one rocking chair, to placed at the left of the front door. On the floor is a tan rug with red and green figures in it. The only picture in the room is a large tinted photograph of Marjory, which is hung on the wall. Marjory's mother is unusually proud of this picture, a true likeness of the little girl.

The door at the right of the room leads into the kitchen. An electric refrigerator, not of a very recent make, is in the extreme right corner of the room. A three-burner gas stove occupies a space at the left, and at the right of the stove to a built-in sink, cupboard and drain board, painted a dull, depressing brown. The dining table and-three chairs to match, also stained brown, are at the right of the door. A worn brown figured linoleum is on the floor. The one window, just above the sink, has muslin curtains similar to those in the bedroom.

The door at the left of the bedroom leads into a modern bathroom with a big, round hot water tank filling one corner of the room. A linoleum, the same pattern as the one in the kitchen, is on the floor, and the only window has a curtain that matches the others in the apartment. The house is always clean and neat, and has a homey atmosphere despite, or perhaps because of, its smallness.

Library of Congress

Gatherine Wade, the 28 year old wife and mother of the family, is a striking looking person, about five feet, nine inches tall. She has black hair, dark complexion, and snapping brown eyes. Her favorite color is red, which is very becoming to her. She must take good care of her clothes, as her income is not sufficient to warrant many new ones. Quite often she alters old clothes to make them look like new, both for herself and family. Even though her means are limited, she looks well-groomed. She has a permanent wave and arranges her own hair and manicures her finger nails at least once a week.

Catherine works as a stenographer in an office in downtown Miami. She is very efficient, and makes \$15 a week, which she considers a fair salary for her job. With this money and the \$5 that her husband gives her each week, she must pay rent, which is \$25 a month, light and gas bills, carfare, buy groceries, lunches and clothes, not an easy task for her.

Much sorrow and trouble have made Catherine a very sympathetic, understanding person. She has a keen knowledge of human nature, making one feel free to talk to her openly on any subject.

“When I was twelve years old my own mother and father put me in a Catholic convent. They thought I needed more rigid discipline than they could give me. I stayed there until I was about 4 17 years old. Of course, I was taught the Catholic faith in the convent and for myself there will never be any other religion, even though I've almost stopped going to church. Other religions are just as good as the Catholic, I suppose, except that to me it is more [reverent?] and worshipful. It impresses me more and I want Marjory to be a Catholic. I wish Ralph would be interested in the Catholic religion, too. He isn't the least bit concerned about any religion and I guess some of it is my fault. I don't believe he has been to church in years, although his mother made him go to Sunday School when he was a boy. He says the church would fall down if he went. I'm going to let Marjory choose her own religion but I hope it will be the Catholic. No other faith will ever satisfy me. Marjory goes to a Baptist Sunday school now, because we don't live near a Catholic church.

Library of Congress

"I don't give any of my hard earned money to any of these charitable institutions. One time I was almost starving and tried to get help from them. But no, they had to use their money to give banquets and dinners for the high-ups. What money I do have, I give to the church. I don't feel bad if I don't have money to put in the collection plate when I go to church, but always contribute if I have it.

"When I was in the convent we went to school every day and I had a time with shorthand and typing. One year my name was in the Gregg Shorthand Magazine because I got a pin for taking dictation 5 at 120 words a minute. I was the only girl in the convent who got the pin that year and I surely was proud of it.

"Sometimes I was very naughty and the Sisters put me in conventry, but I usually had company there. We couldn't talk out loud to each other, so we learned the sign [language?] and talked that way. The Sisters couldn't do a thing about that. We almost worried them to death with our meanness and they were always thinking of new and more effective ways to punish us.

"We had to do our share of work in the convent, too. I worked in the laundry some. We washed all of our own clothes right there in the convent and we had to keep our own rooms clean.

"A lady who had adopted three other children also adopted me and I lived with her until I went to work. She was an old maid school teacher, and a very stern one. We all knew to do as she said and ask no questions. She is still living and teaching school in Colorado and I get a letter from her once in a while. My own father and mother and one sister are still living, too, but I've never lived with them since I was twelve. I hear from my mother and sister sometimes but haven't seen them in years.

"When I went to work, my knowledge of shorthand and typing stood me in good stead and I am surely thankful that I studied them when I went to school. One thing I didn't study that

Library of Congress

I need so much now is bookkeeping. I believe I could get a good job if I knew how to keep books and I am sorry I didn't study that, too. A person must have a good education these days to ever get anywhere, and I want Marjory to finish high school, at least.

"I worked for about two years and lived with a girl friend. She worked in an office, too, and we bid a small apartment together. We surely did have fun keeping house. But when I was nineteen years old I got married, and a year and a half later little Marjory was born. She was a sweet, smart child and started walking before she was a year old. I want a little brother for her, but it is all we can do to take care of the three of us. Besides, my health is not very good and I think we should wait a while to have any children. I love little babies better than anything I know of, though.

"The three of us were very happy together until my husband began drinking. Shortly after this he lost his job, so we left the North and came to Florida, about five years ago. But there were few jobs to be had here then. My husband had injured his back and was unable to work, so we had to go on relief. After a time I got a job in a W. P. A. office. My husband worried himself sick because I had to work, and he drank worse and worse. Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer, so we decided to get a divorce. He went back to Louisiana, his home, and I stayed in Jacksonville with Marjory, who was four years old then. But I was so dissatisfied, I thought that I might be happier to make a new start in another city, so I came to Miami. After a few weeks I got an office job that paid \$25 a week, and Marjory and I lived much better for a while.

"Then Ralph, whom I had met in Jacksonville, came to Miami and got a job here driving a National Biscuit Company truck. We had always been good friends and he was very fond of Marjory. A year ago last December we got married. He was making \$15 a week, and so was I. We were getting along fine and were very happy together. But I suppose all good things must come to an end. All last winter Ralph had a bad foot caused by an inflamed bone in his heel. He had to quit his job and have his foot operated on. The wound didn't

Library of Congress

heal properly and it was swollen and so sore for seven months that he couldn't work. We had to live on what I made, and with all the doctor bills, we got behind in our rent.

"I was luckier than Ralph. About two years ago I had to have an abdominal operation. For the life of me I didn't know where the money was coming from. But through my boss, I heard of a rich man who had set up a fund for working people like myself. He told me that he would pay for the operation and everything. I went to a sanitarium for a month before the operation, to build up my strength and that was paid for, too. When I was in the hospital I had a private room and the best of care. Everybody was so nice to me and for three months, I didn't work. I have felt much better since the operation, and I don't suppose I could ever have afforded it if it hadn't been for this fund.

"Two weeks ago Ralph's neck got awfully sore. For a week he didn't pay any attention to it, but he was in a lot of pain. Finally, a week ago, he went to the doctor and he said Ralph would have to have an operation. He has a carbuncle. He is off from work again and we owe another doctor bill. We haven't finished paying for his foot operation yet, and we are still behind in our rent. We, have had to spend lots of money on doctor bills and medicine, but I hope Ralph will soon be able to go to work again. If we just had \$30 a week again I believe we could get along fine and soon be out of debt."

Ralph is six feet tall, has brown hair and blue eyes. He is 32 years old and drives a truck for a cooky company. His salary is not adequate for the needs of a family of three, after he pays for the up-keep of his truck and other incidentals, so Catherine has to work, too.

"Ralph was raised in the small town of [Waycross?], Georgia. His[.?] brother is a sailor and they surely used to have some good times together. Ralph hasn't seen his brother for a long time. He goes off on trips, doesn't let any body know where he is going, and doesn't write at all. His mother worries a lot about him, but that doesn't worry him any. She is a sweet old-fashioned little lady, but very strict, too. I like her a whole lot and she just adores 9 Marjory. In fact, all of Ralph's family are fond of her.

Library of Congress

“Marjory is six years old and she started to school in September. She likes school all right, but hates to get up at 7:00 o'clock in the morning, especially on cool days. I certainly hope she is smart in school and learns fast, and I really want her to go to college, if we can afford it. Marjory loves all kinds of animals and will bring home any stray cat or dog she can find. Her special delight is feeding and caring for her cat named “Poly.” He has a sore leg and Marjory doctors it every day. She plays about with the children in the neighborhood until I get home from work at six o'clock to cook dinner. It's a bad arrangement, but the best I can do right now. She used to go to a day nursery, but we are not near one now.

“We eat about the same things other people in our position eat[md;?]just plain every day foods. It's hard for me to always have properly balanced meals, working so late at night. I don't have time to come home and cook good meals. About as well balanced meals as I can cook consist of, probably a meat loaf, mashed potatoes, green peas, sliced tomatoes and bread and butter. I cook this kind of meal on Sunday when I don't have to work. We eat lots of potatoes especially Marjory and Ralph. They like almost any kind of vegetable. I do try to give Marjory well balanced meals because growing school children need the right kind of food. She doesn't drink much milk, but I usually fix bacon and eggs for 10 breakfast. Ralph likes bacon and eggs, too. I don't study or read any kind of books on diet. Common sense tells you that you need green vegetables and fruits. I do forget sometimes and have two starches at a meal.

“Ralph comes home every night about 6:30 and we eat at 7:00. When we finish eating we may go for a ride in his truck. Sometimes we have company. We know several young couples and we like to have them visit us. Lots of time we just stay at home and play cards when we have company. I don't play bridge but I do like to play ‘Rummy.’ Sometimes Ralph plays cards with pennies, but he never wins, he is so unlucky. I like to dance but Ralph just won't learn how, no matter how much I coax, so we never go to dances.

Library of Congress

“On Sunday I like to cook a good dinner and have somebody over to eat, and afterwards go to a picture show or for a ride. I really like to go to the show. Clark Gable is my favorite actor and I do wish they would make Gone With the Wind into a picture. Barbara Stanwyck would be the best actress for Scarlet / o'Hara, I think.

“I wish sometime that I didn't have to work. One of the things I enjoy most is ‘piddling’ around in the kitchen cooking new things. Of course, half the time they don't turn out right, although I always use a recipe. My greatest desire is to have a home of my own with a garden large enough to plant flowers. I 11 just love flowers and like to take care of them. But when you don't have the money to buy extra things to cook, and the seed to plant flowers, it's no fun staying home and trying to do all those things on nothing.

“We don't have a car of our own but I surely would like to have one. You can have so much pleasure just riding in them, but it costs lots of money to buy them and run them afterwards. When we go out we use Ralph's truck. If we had a car I wouldn't mind living farther out of town than we do, but since I have to come in to work I had rather have a home close to town.

“Ralph and I bought us a radio on the installment plan. We surely did enjoy it when we had it, but when Ralph had his operation and had to quit work, we turned it back in because we couldn't keep up with the payments on it. I didn't miss it as much as I thought I would, I am gone from home so much of the time, anyway.

“Ralph surely would like to bet on the horses if he had the money. Last winter when his foot was sore and he couldn't work, he kept up with all the horses that ran. He kept a chart of the ones he picked and how many won. If he had had the money to bet on them, he would have made lots more to go with it, but he couldn't afford to take the chance.

Library of Congress

“Of course, Ralph likes to go out by himself. He goes out with a friend of his who drives a truck for the same company he works 12 for. I don't know where all they go, but I do know he plays poker sometimes, and he likes beer pretty well.

“Lots of times we go fishing on Sunday, with two or three other couples. We start early most of the time and fish all day. Of course, we usually get sunburned and our hands blistered, but I still think it's a lot of fun. We don't go to the beach much because I don't swim. Ralph likes to, though, but somehow we just never got around to going. I just don't care so much for outdoor sports, I had rather spend my time reading a good book. The books I read I get at the Public Library and I try to keep up with the newest ones. Gone With the Wind is one of my favorites and I read it in two days. I surely did enjoy it. Ralph reads the newspaper every night after dinner and keeps up with the political situation and current events.

“But I don't know why he doesn't take any more interest in voting than he does. He thinks Roosevelt is a grand president and so do I. We are both Democrats but, as I say, don't vote like we should. Ralph's people are all strong Democrats, especially his father. But because Ralph doesn't take much interest in politics, I don't take an active part either.”