



Mother Barbara Austine Dickerson Wells

August 27, 1937 - September 13, 2019

A fierce, feminine force of faith, Barbara Austine Dickerson, was born August 27, 1937, Bells, Tennessee, United States of America; the first child born to Eddie and Edith Dickerson and a new member of a society renewing itself.

In 1937, Franklin D. Roosevelt has just been reelected to his second of four terms as President of the USA and the country is lifting itself up and out of its Great Depression; people are getting back to work-not simply the work it had known, but work specially designed, created through the government's resolve to force itself into solution, productivity, and care in the public arena.

And it is important to know these seemingly extraneous facts about the larger context of her birth, for they constitute the conditions that would over time yield a Mother Barbara Dickerson Wells.

She emerged in the midst of a dynamic and prototypically American climate of public reformation and spiritual revival. The air of the 1940's and 1950's would imbue her identity with the initiative and resourcefulness that served to help her partner her budding faith with a vivacious, aesthetic work of service to God, family, Church, and neighbor.

She occurs at a time when more and more women are finding a place on the public stage through public service. And she takes note. Eleanor Roosevelt

has come into her own; Mary McLeod Bethune is real; Marian Anderson is still singing.

Regular men have just constructed the Hoover Dam. Men like her father, grandfathers, and great-grandfather have built with their own hands the homes in which she dwelled and the churches in which she worshipped; the art deco influence on textiles, fashion, and architecture would acquaint her with institutionalized, public beauty.

A future pastor's wife, she witnesses widespread Christian evangelism reach a level of popularity that has not since so thrived. The future singer would experience the golden age of gospel music giving rise to Clara Ward, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, and Dorothy Love Coates. And she did not ignore broader fields of the American musical spirit; she cherished the works of American-Canadian bandleader, Guy Lombardo. As the entire nation moves in dynamic directions of creativity, renewal, and standards, so does the young Barbara.

There was not much difference between the American standard and Christian righteousness during her formative years; she could attune herself to the mind and manner of upstanding public figures as much as she would adhere to the Biblical teachings of her parents: to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18); to prove herself a worker that needeth not be ashamed (2 Timothy 2:15); to find, and refine, the relationship between beauty and holiness and that as a state, form, and means of worship (Psalm 96:9).

She is a teen and young adult in the 1950's, perhaps the age of the glorified housewife, and learns to respect the amplified, modernized role of women in the home. Although the role and moniker, housewife, lost its respectable status after the 70's - and that due to public outcry through feminism, women's rights, and notions of equality - the role of domestic power

and authority did not belittle or embarrass her or her generation.

The home thrilled her and invited her skills and creativity; it honed her leadership and administrative skills it cultivated genius.

Indeed, she had received great teaching from a master multitasker, her mother, Edith Dickerson, who knew well the difference and purpose of the cedar chest, the hope chest, the chifferobe, and the sideboard. She said of her mother, a mother of 12, and master of home management, "My mother always kept an immaculate house."

Certainly the servant-leadership roles of women impressed Barbara Dickerson, but it is not enough to say that only great women of renown influenced her. "Bobbie," as her family would call her would benefit as well in her formative years from lesser known women of the highest standards. Even on her death bed, she continued to speak reverently of her very first school teachers, Ms. Jenrette, Ms. Gibbs, and Ms. Logan of the Bells Elementary School. Further still, she highly regarded leading women of her family and church: her own highly organized mother, Edith Dickerson, Arenia C. Mallory of the Church of God in Christ, her own great-grandmother - landowner and midwife, Mary Freeman. (As midwife to many, Freeman delivered Barbara Austine and most of her brothers and sisters.)

Barbara Dickerson would hold herself accountable for the rest of her life to the moral teachings of her paternal grandmother, educator Ida Chandler; and her entrepreneurial, maternal grandmother, Joycie Schillicutt, each of whom functionally defined the standards of morality, dignity, and enterprise.

A seeker of wisdom; a collector of books (volumes and volumes and encyclopedic sets of books! Floor-to-ceiling magazines on the home, faith,

and character); a devotee of manner, form, and style as exemplified by public figures from Amy Vanderbilt to Jackie Kennedy; a good housekeeper; Barbara Austine Dickerson would learn, and in time produce a body of work that confirmed, frankly speaking, "the woman's role" and identity in humanity.

To her it was a big, honorable privilege to BE a WOMAN; a precious status, a meaning not to be taken for granted; unfuzzy; definable; a calling. The young Barbara would emulate female virtuosity as it moved gracefully, or stood immovably, in the face of public tumult or personal distress.

A truly inspired gift to the Church, to America, and to the human race, her work, a woman's work, would cross a plethora of disciplines, media, and skill sets (music, fashion, the decorative arts, oration; self-enterprise; even penmanship beyond the likes of John Hancock) to perfect the lives of women, of churches, of families, and of households throughout her lifetime and likely well beyond it. There was no place like the Church for such a perfectionist - holiness being the highest standard of perfection.

Accordingly, Barbara Dickerson, like many of her youth loved the Church Of God In Christ - and for good reason. Also a 20th century American phenomenon, the Church Of God In Christ manifested dynamic gifts of the Holy Spirit, remarkable talent, which flourished in tandem with the abounding wealth of the nation.

Barbara found that in the Church, not simply in society's economy, one could find too, great style of fashion, other inspired women, upstanding women, delectable taste in food, ebullience of fellowship, enviable musicianship, and the wisdom-based preaching meant to keep one whole, sound, and ready for the Coming of the Lord.

In the Church, for all of her youthful, hopeful, creative options, there was security - a reduction of the degrees of freedom; discipline and decision. In this realm of bounty, and good, and discipleship, she would choose to establish her faithful work through the sharing of her gifts, the giving of her time, and the commitment of her life.

Raised largely in Kankakee, Illinois, her parents' moved the family to Chicago in the 1940's. They worshipped under the pastorship of Elder Odell Reed and later, Superintendent H. W. Wilson and his highly respected wife, Eleanor; Bishop Louis Henry Ford would also serve as their pastor, and later, their Presiding Bishop.

Her father once recounted that Chicago in the 40's scared him so that he moved his family back to Tennessee. But he soon returned with strengthened disciplines that would serve, secure, and stabilize, his large and still growing family. He often held church services in the home in which all of the children, and later, grandchildren, actively engaged.

As a highly trained automobile mechanic on Chicago's north side, he often took the younger children, and later, the grandchildren, to work with him teaching them mechanical and auto service skills; he taught his daughters the spirituals and harmony by ear.

Through his teaching, Barbara led her sisters in the formation of an a capella singing group. The Dickerson Sisters made a name for themselves quickly as teenagers and young adults within the Church Of God In Christ.

And though soon discovered, like many church singers, by the entertainment scene, Barbara counseled her sisters to remain in the Church. They secured a unity among themselves and perfected a 3-part harmony of soft subtle tones very much unlike the bold, visceral gospel of the day. Theirs rather borrowed

from the style, and songs, of the romantic, wartime entertainers, such as The McGuire Sisters and the Andrews sisters.

They perfected such melodies as "I Asked the Lord to Comfort Me," "He," and "Love Lifted Me." Frequent public performances pressed Barbara to heighten her sense of style and fashion design as the costume designer of the singing group.

And though continuously sought after to join the night club scene and recording industry of popular music, the singers satisfied, and sanctified, themselves within the Church. They were in good, the very best of, company. Along with other of Chicago's Central Illinois singers like The Oliver Sisters, Jerry Bratton, James Lenox, and Brozie Whitehead, the Dickerson Sisters regularly performed in the midnight musicals held at Bishop Ford's St. Paul Church Of God In Christ as well as the International Youth Congress.

It was the early 1960's and an exhilarating time to be young, churched, and happy and she was. Although in high social demand, each sister married a pastor and assisted in building the missions of several Churches Of God In Christ between them.

In the 1960's, with the nation in upheaval whether rioting, marching, or shooting off to the moon, Barbara assumed the role of a young pastor's wife having married the tall, dark, and handsome Reverend Lonnie L. Wells, a devoted builder of churches in both Mississippi and Chicago.

With him she found an ideal setting to expand, proof, and give of her gifts and service as the team established Evangelist Temple Church Of God In Christ. And she was ready. She saw that the church house warranted, and needed, the same detail of care as did her own intricately designed home, where she

did such things as dye water, pour it into clear decorative bottles; sit the bottled water of differing colors in the bay windows of her living room to break up sunlight into prismatic colors of the rainbow.

By midday, it was a light show. For her children it was like growing up in a science fair, art gallery, construction site, or library of a home. So often could she change the wallpaper, stucco the bathroom wall, make a dress, and reupholster the sofa, that one visitor remarked that when she opened the door, it was a little like entering Emerald City.

Barbara Dickerson Wells was a virtual scientist, an artist, a small industry. As a young entrepreneur, she designed, and tailored clothes for many. Specializing in festive and formal dress wear for women, she dressed many a woman wanting to look her best - for the wedding or for the convention. Preparing multi-garment wardrobes especially for hard to fit women, she carefully selected the weight, weave, and drape of fabric; tailored excellent fit, and sent her clients off renewed - usually to the Women's Convention of the Church Of God In Christ or its Youth Congress.

Looking back on her mother's work, one of her daughters asked, "Didn't you feel abused because you never charged enough?" Her mother responded, "No. I loved it. I just loved it." Moving to Memphis in the early 1970's, she quickly gained notoriety for her detailed skill in upholstery and dressmaking.

She earned the keys to many a fine home in Memphis where she would consult on interior decoration; design drapery; and reupholster sofas and chairs. In very little time Memphis Church officials took note of her speaking and administrative skills.

Superintendent F. D. Macklin named her District Missionary of the Homeland

District and she was appointed President of the AB Patton Circle, a women's organization and ministry arm of the church into the community.

This ministry was named in honor of Mother A. B. Patton, Supervisor Department of Women Tennessee First Jurisdiction. Over the course of time, in the Department of Women, she would go on to serve five districts as District Missionary, Secretary for the Jurisdictional Women's Department, Women's Convention Coordinator, Regional District Missionary, Chairperson for the Board of Examiners for Missionary Licensure, and Assistant Jurisdictional Supervisor.

At the local level, she would serve as choir member, Trustee Board member, member of the editing and administrative support staff, Sunday School teacher, President of the Women's Department, and cook. Outside of the church, and her own enterprise, she worked in many public school offices as administrative assistant to the Principal.

As much as we, the home, the church and society, have been blessed to have witnessed such a refined unique, individual, in Barbara Austine Dickerson, she loved, oddly enough, simply being in the number- in the congregation; in the family; in the mix. She loved, and felt especially blessed, being a member of the Church Of God In Christ where she served, invested, planted, and restored her life until her dying day.

If she could speak at her own funeral, she would say thank YOU. She would thank YOU, the Wells Family, for the blood and care of her children; for being there for her to love, for shaping her young adulthood as a wife, and a mother, and a servant.

She would thank YOU, the Dickerson lineage for those Scots-Irish-green eyes, for festive gatherings, for causing her to laugh until those green eyes

cried. Thank you for the joy. She would thank YOU, The Chandler family, whom she revered, for your hunger and thirst for righteousness. She too has been filled and fulfilled. She would thank YOU, The Schillicutts (from the German "Schlect") for those hazel, blue, and green eyes, closeness and commitment to the farm and to the land; for her haunting Cherokee blood and memory.

And she would thank YOU, The Freemans, for your dignified stance in, and against, the face of American slavery never forgetting, If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed (John 8:36). Thank YOU America for your fearless standard of care and refinement. And oh how she would thank the Lord for the Church Of God In Christ! She would say thank YOU for planting her feet, helping to direct her path toward, and up, the King's Highway. She has made it.

Most Certainly, she would lift up that graceful mid-soprano voice, eloquent of speech, and sing, There's a little wheel a turnin' in my heart..., I feel so very happy in my heart..., I love everybody in my heart..., In my heart, Lord in my heart, I love everybody in my heart.

Barbara Dickerson Wells, a mother, a sister, a servant, leaves to mourn her passing five children: Karlen A. Davis of Phoenix, Arizona; LaMargeria al-Gendy of Hurleyville, New York; Bishop Dickerson L. S. Wells (Valesa) of Memphis, Tennessee; Elder Eduardo E. F. Wells (Theresa) of Somerville, Tennessee; and Elder Roman H. Q. Wells (Gloria) of Belleville, Illinois. She also leaves fourteen grandchildren: Michael and Christopher of Phoenix, Arizona; Ahmed of Hurleyville, New York; Dickerson, II of Denver, Colorado; Chandler and Chantelle both of Memphis, Tennessee; ZaQuita of LaVergne, Tennessee; Edriana of Memphis, Tennessee; Tyrus of Aviano Air Force Base, Italy; Eduardo, II of Somerville, Tennessee; Morgan, Megan,

Millenia, and Roman, II all of Belleville, Illinois. She also leaves seven great-grandchildren Maya and Bianca both of Phoenix, Arizona; Dominic, Jr., Zalan, Justice, and Mariyah all of LaVergne, Tennessee; and Summer of Somerville, Tennessee. She also leaves three brothers: Eddie Dickerson, Jr. (Patricia) of San Francisco, California; Arthur Dickerson of Charleston, South Carolina; and Benjamin Dickerson of Chicago, Illinois; one sister: Beverly Dickerson of Flossmoor, Illinois; her aunts: Mrs. Ella Holloway of Chicago, Illinois, Mrs. Virginia Wade of Alamo, Tennessee, and Mrs. Annie Wyatt of Akron, Ohio; one uncle: Mr. James L. Dickerson, Sr., (Countess) of Memphis, Tennessee; four brothers-in-law: Mr. Arzell Acklin of Chicago, Illinois; Superintendent Van Wells of Chicago, Illinois; Deacon James Wells (Georgine) of Moss Point, Mississippi; and Mr. Kenneth Ware, Sr., of Beloit, Wisconsin. Countless nieces, nephews, and cousins as well as her local church, Bethel, and the Saints of the Church Of God In Christ.

Cemetery Details

Bellview Cemetery

Margin St
Bells, TN 38006

Previous Events

Visitation

SEP 20. 4:00 PM - 6:30 PM (CT)

Bethel Church Of God In Christ
2216 Clifton Avenue
Memphis , TN 38127

Service

SEP 21. 10:00 AM (CT)

Faith Temple Ministries Church Of God In Christ
5191 Elvis Presley Boulevard , TN 38116

Tribute Wall



“ *Mother Barbara Austine Dickerson Wells*

January 28, 2023 at 12:37 PM

BD

“ Dear Elder Roman and Gloria Wells, Millenia, Megan, Morgan,
Roman and Family,

I am writing to express to you my heartfelt condolences and prayers of comfort to you and your family for the passing of your beloved Mother Barbara Austine Dickerson Wells. Our hearts and prayers go out to you and your family during what must be the most trying of times.

I believe the loss of one's mother is by far one of the hardest of life's events. No matter how old we are, losing a mother is one of the deepest sorrows a heart can know. But her goodness, her caring, and her wisdom live on, like a legacy of love that will always be with you. I lost my own mother and I remember how I grieved. Celebrating her life is a beautiful way to honor her. I want you to know that my thoughts are with you. We join in with everyone who knew your mother in praying your peace and comfort in this very difficult time.

The Bible says "Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted." I pray you will find peace and comfort in these words and that God will give you the strength and courage now and in the days ahead. May the love of family and friends carry you through your mourning. Even in the days ahead, we're still here for you—even if you just need someone to listen.

On behalf of myself, First Lady and your LifeChanger family at New Life in Christ Interdenominational Church, please know you and your loved ones are in our thoughts and prayers. The connection to your church family is more important than ever before; remain connected. If there is anything we can do, please do not hesitate to ask.

*With the utmost sincerity,
Geoffrey V. Dudley, Sr., Ph.D., D.Min
Senior Pastor*

Bishop Dudley - September 18, 2019 at 04:11 PM

HW

“ *To: Bishop Dickerson-Wells and family,*

Condolences from Monee, IL (outside of Chicago).. Our prayers are with you and be encouraged for the life of a saint and mother who lived a cherished long legacy. We are not able to make the services in Memphis, but you have our continued support in the celebration of life services.

Your cousins, Howard and Shirley White (the late RC Weddle's daughter)

Howard & Shirley (Weddle) White - September 17, 2019 at 07:11 PM