

Written by Janna Ross

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"I was just kinda reminiscing," stated Kathy Wesson as she demonstrated how she was peering into the Clark County Recorder's Office with her neck outstretched and eyes wide.

She recalled, "It was after four and the building was pretty much empty. I had just went downstairs from jury duty and was looking at the pictures. Then Dick Jones asked me if he could help me."

That one question posed in June 2008 has now been answered.

Yes, Jones could help Wesson and she could help him.

Wesson proceeded to ask Jones if he knew that he was missing a picture of a Clark County Recorder.

"My mom's picture was not there," Wesson stated.

Wesson's mom, Catherine Poff, took over the responsibility of the Clark County Recorder after her husband, Julius, was drafted by the Navy in 1942 to defend our country during World War II. While Julius was protecting his country on the Battleship New Mexico, Catherine proceeded to tackle the job of Recorder and mother of five children ranging in age from 10 years to 15 months old.

The thought of taking over for her husband was natural. The entire family jumped in to help take care of the family's 26 acre farm in St. Joe with the help of Grandpa William Poff.

"Grandpa would help take care of us while Mom was working," daughter Mary Ann Reed recalled. "Then she would come home and make a big dinner and get ready for the next day."

Mary Ann also remembered her Mom worrying about the rations.

"Then there were rations on sugar, gas and tires for cars. I remember her worrying about things like that also. She had to ration the items at home because if you ran out, you were just out, you couldn't run to the store and buy more," Mary Ann stated.

The other Poff siblings recalled the Black Outs that occurred during the time also.

"They would blow the whistle and the lights had to go out," stated son Fr. Pius Poff. Once Pius stated the memory, the heads of the other siblings nodded in agreement.

Not only did Catherine have to manage the office of Recorder but also manage her home in some of the most trying times in the country's history.

One matter Catherine had to overcome personally to be able to take over for her husband was transportation. She did not drive. Catherine's brother-in-law came to the rescue.

"I remember hearing the story of how Mom learned to drive. Our uncle took her from State Road 60 to State Road 111 to St. Joe. That loop is where she learned to drive. She only got one lesson and back then it was on a stick shift (transmission)," Kathy stated.

Learning to drive was one of the big steps in taking over her husband's role of Recorder. Catherine now had a way to downtown Jeffersonville from her St. Joe home each day.

Julius was dubbed the "Cinderella Kid" by friends and in published articles after the 1941 election where he went from being an assistant Janitor at the County Building to the Clark County Recorder. Julius worked to clean the building for six years prior to taking the office of Recorder. In one published article Poff, who was only 31, was quick to give praise to his "campaign manager."

"He was lavish in his praise of his 'campaign manager' Wesley Everhart, 'Uncle Wes' to officers of the court house," the article stated.

Everhart was the custodian at the court house when Julius was elected.

Catherine was acting Recorder during the four years of her husband's absence. She was appointed and agreed upon by the Clark County Commissioners of the era, Clarence Bower and Warren Bottorff. She diligently worked to uphold the office of Recorder and make her Navy

husband and five children very proud of her accomplishments.

"The research I have done shows the Indiana Audit Reports from the time are all perfect," Jones stated. "When Julius and Catherine were in the office, the reports are perfect. That is something in itself. That's when all the records were hand written."

Mary L. Schafer Anderson worked in the office of Recorder with both Julius and Catherine.

"They have such great records because they kept good help," Anderson stated with a great laugh. "That's when we had manual typewriters. We had to type all the deeds. We would type them and then read them back word for word to make sure they were accurate. We had to type everything, every comma, every name, just everything."

"The sacrifice that Julius made, as did all of our parents and neighbors, and the fact that Mrs. Poff, that's what I always called her was Mrs. Poff, was appointed and ran the office, it was nothing but a good experience. And then how the family all pitched in, it is just a great story," Jones concluded.

Julius, who was a Democrat, was elected for two terms as the Clark County Recorder before running for Clerk. During his political career he won an election over a 20-year veteran G.O.P. incumbent.

A political career is not exactly what Julius thought he would have, although he followed in the footsteps of his father, William, who was also had a little politician blood running through his veins.

After a medical battle where his appendix burst, he announced he would become a Priest.

"He planned to become a Priest," stated his son, Fr. Pius, who did follow his father's initial dream of becoming a Priest. Father Pius still can recall stories of his father and mother being the Recorder as he can show published articles and pieces of memorabilia he has kept safe in a scrapbook and tell a very detailed and interesting story for each picture, article and piece of memorabilia in the book.

The Poff siblings are very grateful for the attention and dedication that Jones gave in researching the role of their mother as Clark County Recorder in the absence of their father, Julius. Each sibling, Father Pius "Robert" Poff of Mt. St. Francis, Mary Ann Reed of New Albany, Bernie "Bernard" Poff of St. Joe, Jim Poff of New Albany, and Kathy Wesson of Charlestown were all quick to shake Jones' hand and thank him for taking the time to honor their mother. Dennis Poff was unable to attend the meeting due to being at work. The Poff siblings lost their oldest brother, Carl in 2003.

A beautiful picture of Catherine Poff now adorns the wall, hanging next to other former Recorders of Clark County. The picture offered by the family was framed by Ernie Thompson of Ernie's Framing. Although it took over a year to get the project completed, Catherine has now taken her spot in the history of Clark County while her husband also took a spot in the history of Clark County as the "Cinderella Kid" and as a Chief Petty Officer and Head Chef on the Battleship New Mexico serving the United States Navy.

Julius Poff passed away on January 20, 1985 while Catherine passed away on October 7, 2006. The two shared 52 years of marriage.