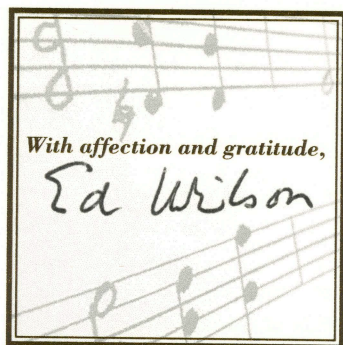


# Songs

of WAKE FOREST

*Tributes by* **Edwin G. Wilson**

*Edited by Catherine Burroughs and Tamara McLaughlin*



WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY  
WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA

# Mark Reece

*Alumnus, Dean's Office*

*Received the Medallion of Merit in 1996*

**T**HERE ARE MANY OF US HERE this morning – and I am one of them – who consider Mark Reece as fine a man as they have ever known. And they honor him for a life lived beautifully and well.

Why is this so? What was there about Mark Reece that made us admire him so much?

There was, of course, his career: thirty-two years of service to Wake Forest, from the placid fifties through the turbulent sixties and seventies down to the fast-changing eighties. And somehow – today – I picture him, most of all, as he was in the sixties: an endlessly busy and endlessly creative dean of men: young, smiling, patient, irresistibly friendly.

Being a dean in those years was not easy. Students were restless, seething, sometimes angry, inclined to protest against whatever displeased them. The campus atmosphere was unpredictable and mercurial, if not revolutionary. And it was the peculiar responsibility of Mark and his friend



and colleague Lu Leake, in this uncertain environment, to maintain order and discipline.

And they did so. Largely through the efforts of Mark and Lu, Wake Forest remained essentially unscarred. What happened in so many other places did not happen here – partly, I think, because Mark believed in the integrity of his assignment. He was a man of tradition, a family man, a church-going Baptist by inheritance

and by conviction, and disrespect for propriety and law displeased him. He did not hesitate to stand ready outside a dormitory when disruption of the peace was threatened or to rebuke, and punish, a student who did violence to his – and Wake Forest’s – convictions of what was right.

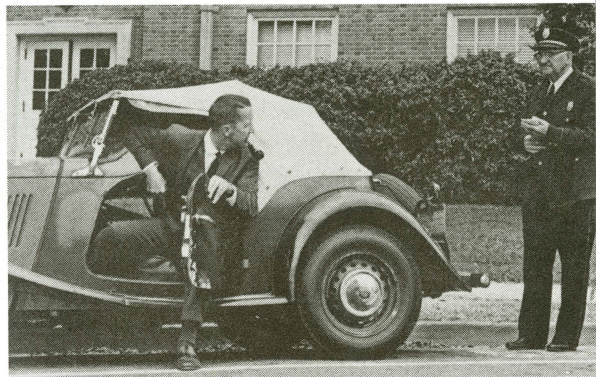
But there was another side to the sixties – and another side to Mark Reece. Beyond what was distasteful or threatening about those years, there was also an idealism, a high-mindedness of spirit that manifested itself again and again in, for example, the civil rights movement, in a concern for the poor and the dispossessed, in the rediscovery of the common man. The culture of Wake Forest student life, like the culture of the American young, was richly visible and full of vitality, and Mark understood and appreciated that culture.

So it was that Mark, even while being true to his burdensome duties as Dean of Men, saw to it that Wake Forest embraced what was valuable and inspirational about the young men and women of these “changing” times. And so, in those days, we heard speakers who came in from everywhere – left, right, and center; and we listened in huge crowds – to Joan Baez and Simon and Garfunkel and Peter, Paul, and Mary; and we watched movies – every night, if we chose – in a film program that was recognized as being among

the very best in the nation. With the help of one secretary and a handful of gifted students, Mark was a veritable one-man Student Union. And, besides everything else, he invented the brilliant idea that Wake Forest should build a collection of contemporary art out of the best works that New York City had to offer. Go when you can to the Reece Gallery in the Benson Center and see what that collection has become: look at its variety, its boldness, its artistic summary of the last thirty years of American life.

That collection of art is a legacy of Mark Reece, and it will continue to illuminate our lives. But Mark’s real legacy is elsewhere.

The last time I saw Mark, I was visiting him in his bedroom, surrounded by paintings and drawings and posters that were full of color and power. He was, as you know, very frail: he could not stand, he could not



*Mark Reece finds that being Dean of Men does not offer sufficient diplomatic immunity against “Bunker” Hill, infamous campus cop.*

hear, he must have been endlessly frustrated and in almost constant pain. But his smile was ready, his handshake was warm, his mind was vigorous, and – most of all – there was still a light in his eyes, undimmed and honest. And it was a light that could only have shown out of love.

We loved Mark Reece, I think, because – quite simply – he was lovable and because he loved us. He loved his colleagues; he loved his neighbors; he loved students, even – maybe especially – those whom he had to discipline. Many people come and go and even spend years on a college campus, and they may come to be respected for one thing or another. But Mark is one of those rare college people who deserve – and receive – our abiding love.

Maybe love came easy to him because, in his family, he was surrounded by so much love. When I think of Shirley, his college sweetheart and his wife of many happy years, I remember the familiar words of the marriage ceremony. Were these words ever more appropriate than they are today as we think of Shirley and Mark? “To have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.” And after Mark and Shirley come Mark Junior and John and Jordan and their

wives and Lisa and her husband and ten splendid grandchildren: a legacy beyond money or power or fame; a legacy of honor and of a love that to this very day “believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

Some years ago I was asked to speak at a retirement dinner for Mark. I said about him then that he was a man “without pretense and without malice,” and I concluded with some lines from Shakespeare that I would like to quote again this morning. In his tribute to Brutus, the “noblest Roman” of them all, Marc Antony says:

*His life was gentle, and the elements  
So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world, "This was a man!"*

“Gentle” may seem to be a little word, and “man” is also a little word. But, as Shakespeare uses them at the end of the play and at the end of Brutus’s life, he suggests harmony and reconciliation and being at peace with oneself.

Mark Reece was at peace with himself. He was “gentle.” He was also a “man.” In fact, Mark Reece was – is – will remain for us all – the dean of men.

May 15, 1997