

***Testimony
of the
Infant Children***

The Untold Story

John Samuel Graves III

In memory of my parents:
John Samuel Graves, Jr.
and
Florence Rubert Graves

Testimony of the Infant Children is an older legal term that referred to minor children under the age of 18 witnessing in a court of law. That happens in the following true story. All of the persons named in this book are – or were – real people. Because I want this narrative to be historically accurate I have not changed any names. Copies of the actual court records of this custody case were saved by my mother for over fifty years before she passed them on to me. Her records may be the only copies left in existence to prove that the events and testimonies presented here actually took place in Beaufort and Bluffton, South Carolina, in 1951.

Actions of past generations can have dramatic impacts on the lives of those living in the present time. This book presents a lasting record of the consequences of some fateful events within my own family and attempts to fight the inevitable cultural amnesia that often conceals or buries truths about the past.

This book would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of my wife, R.S. Perry, artist, writer, musician, soul mate, and best friend who has been an indefatigable reader and editor.

Front Cover: R.T. Wilson, Jr.'s Palmetto Bluff Mansion, circa 1920's.
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Preface

Small southern towns can keep many secrets. I am haunted by the pain and confusion my brothers and I suffered over seventy years ago in one of those towns, Bluffton, SC. I have spent hours mulling over the events that really happened there in my childhood. I have tried to understand the hidden motives and desires of my parents. Both in their own way were responsible for the terror and disillusionment my two brothers and I experienced in 1951. I have carefully read, reread, and studied the legal records from the court cases that resulted from my parents' actions. More questions were raised than final answers. I will never know the full truth.

Discovering that my parents possessed clay feet was not always pleasant. How did my beautiful, talented mother, raised in the rarefied atmosphere of the super wealth of multi-millionaire New Yorker, R.T. Wilson, Jr., come to marry a desperately poor South Carolina oysterman? Why did their initial love and passionate romance turn into bitterness and pity?

The following narrative is a cautionary tale about the consequences for children and adults when parents separate and later on fight acrimonious custody battles. The Courts of both South Carolina and Pennsylvania attempted to determine the truths about this domestic case. It made the front page of Philadelphia's *The Legal Intelligencer*, one of the nation's oldest and most respected law publications.

I found it difficult to be objective about such personal family matters as described in this book. However, I have attempted to show a balanced picture of my parents. Both had debilitating character flaws and remarkable personal strengths. What they did to each other and to us, their children, resonates to this day in my and my brothers' lives and our children's lives. I hope that readers may be touched by this story in such a way that they find themselves convinced that their own lives impact those around them, and that their actions and words – or failures to act or speak – have permanent meaning and reverberate over time, especially when meticulously recorded, highly detailed, and eventually made public.

John Samuel Graves III

Easter, April 17, 2022

The Back Story

My parents, Florence Rubert Graves (née Florence Lillian Rubert) and John Samuel Graves, Jr. were married in 1939 near Bluffton, SC. The consequences of their separation in 1950 are the primary focus of this book. However, chapters 1-3 provide a brief history of their respective birth families: Rubert and Cadugan; Graves and Guilford. Those stories provide a better understanding of my parents' subsequent actions. The genealogy below is a condensed view of the Rubert and Graves families.

Genealogy

Florence Lillian Rubert 1916-2010
(My mother)

John Samuel Graves, Jr. 1910-1964
(My father)

Harlem George Rubert 1887-1975
& Florence Inez Cadugan 1888-1968
(My mother's parents)

John Samuel Graves, Sr. 1879-1963
& Cora Jane Guilford 1884-1951
(My father's parents)

Charles W. Rubert 1858-1911
& Libby V. Carter 1865-1932
(Harlem George Rubert's parents)

Andrew Asbury Graves 1851-1935
& Agnes Mae Forrester 1847-1914
(John Samuel Graves, Sr.'s parents)

William Andrew Cadugan 1860-1903
& Harriet Inez Bushnell 1868-1951
(Florence Inez Cadugan's parents)

George Sewell Guilford 1846-1917
& Jane Hore 1856-1938
(Cora Jane Guilford's parents)

It is impossible to know all the facts about our relatives' lives, but in the end, the love that many of them showed and expressed for each other, their children, and their children's children is all we actually have that lasts. That love often passes unseen between generations. Most of the members of my extended family are now gone, but I can state unequivocally that they knew how to give and receive love. They measured all human experience by whether or not love had been expressed or denied. Those of us who were lucky enough to be exposed to them and their descendants will forever be grateful for their supreme gift to us: unstinting love.