

**Dedication of the Isabella and Frank Wickenhauser
Memorial Library Fund
for Television, Film, and Theater Arts**

Women's Building Formal Lounge
Washington University

Thursday April 16, 1998

Mark S. Wrighton, Chancellor

Good afternoon everyone and welcome. If I could just ask you to take your seats we'll begin our program.

Colleagues and friends, it's a great pleasure to be with you this afternoon as we mark the establishment of this wonderful memorial fund. The fund is named for Isabella and Frank Wickenhauser. It comes as a consequence of an extraordinarily generous bequest which came to Washington University from Mary Wickes, their daughter. And I have to tell you that when I joined Washington University I didn't know the richness of the group of graduates that we would experience here. And just shortly after my inauguration in October of 1995, I learned of this very thoughtful and generous bequest which makes this memorial fund possible.

It's an extraordinarily important one, as events and our planning has unfolded here at Washington University because the fund supports intellectual activity in television, film, and theater arts. This is an important area in the academic life of the University, and with these new resources that are available to us in our libraries, the academic program can be

accelerated and made more vital and made more appropriate for our students and faculty who have had the aspiration that the University move more rapidly in these areas.

So on behalf of the entire University I want to express my gratitude to the forethoughtfulness of our distinguished alumna, Mary Wickes, and also to my academic colleagues here at the University for thinking that this would be an exciting initiative to undertake. I know a lot of people in Arts and Sciences especially have given thought to what we might do in this area. Scholarly resources in our libraries make possible the great work of our faculty and our students, and enhancing the resource base in this area is certainly critical to our advance as a University.

Shirley Baker, who is Dean of Libraries here at Washington University, is certainly a great leader for us. I've been very impressed, and have learned something about the history here, knowing that she came in at a time when the libraries needed renewed attention. She has been not only responsive to the faculty and student interests in terms of service responsibilities; but I might also add that she's been very creative in that responsiveness, and has adopted the development of our scholarly resources in a way that complements the interests of our students and faculty. And I want to acknowledge her prudent management on the one hand, and her creative and energetic work on behalf of the entire University community. A number of programs that are undertaken under the leadership of Shirley Baker and her colleagues in the libraries make our entire University life more exciting, more rewarding intellectually, and for our students and faculty, make possible original scholarship which is so vital to the life of a research university.

I'm very appreciative of the opportunity to be here at a time when things are moving so rapidly. I'm appreciative of those who have been great stewards for the University. And not least among these is my predecessor, Bill Danforth, who had the good sense to recruit Shirley Baker. Bill and Ibby are with us this afternoon, and I'm grateful for the leadership they've extended in this regard. Also, the Executive Vice Chancellor and Dean of Arts and Sciences is here, Ed Macias. He, too, showed great wisdom in developing this strong relationship with the libraries, and encouraging the development of the scholarly resources that we need as a great academic institution.

This new set of initiatives that we're undertaking will, I think bring great advantage to us as we make our way to attract ever-increasingly strong students. Certainly Henry Schvey has made the case compellingly to me that we're attracting a group of students that are not only very interested but also very talented and capable in these very creative areas of expression.

So we're celebrating something very significant today, not only a generous bequest but also a time in the life of the University where we're making rapid advance in important areas for our students and faculty – and for generations to come, considering that this is an endowed fund which will provide resources in perpetuity for the purposes of television, film, and theater arts work here at Washington University. It gives me pleasure, therefore, to introduce the Dean of the University Libraries, Shirley Baker.

Shirley Baker
Vice Chancellor for Information Technology
and Dean of University Libraries

Thank you Chancellor Wrighton. But before you hear from me, and before you hear from Mary's close friend, Father Richards, we thought you should hear from Mary herself – which of course explains these strange drapes. But we've put together a video with information about Mary to remind those of us about her voice, what a great actress she was. Let's have it roll.

[video - "Mary Wickes: A Full Life"]

Shirley Baker

Now that we've let Mary speak for herself a little, I'd like to make a few remarks myself.

We're here to celebrate Mary, her career, her accomplishments, her dedication to the University and its Libraries, and of course to her parents, Isabella and Frank Wickenhauser. There are a number of people today who actually knew Mary Wickes, and some of them perhaps might have known her parents. These are very lucky people. But of course we all feel as if we know her.

Her bequest to the Washington University Libraries supports, as Chancellor Wrighton said, our theater, film, and television efforts. These are areas of the University that cross

departmental and school lines, and touch on students' lives outside their curricular work – indeed, as do libraries.

Every university and college has some amateur theatricals. In his history of Washington University, our Historian, Ralph Morrow, commented as follows on Washington University:

At many universities, athletics was said to unite the student body. But at Washington, before the First World War, dramatics came closest to filling that role. With no more than occasional help from faculty members, usually in the English Department, and a few theater buffs in the city, students made Washington University the busiest center of theatrical activity in St. Louis.

Certainly at the several universities I've been associated with, theater was a shared experience, something that brought us together – brought together faculty, students, and members of the community. And of course here, student theatricals and play writing classes in the English Department led ultimately to the formation of a drama department, which is of course now the Department of Performing Arts, headed by Henry Schvey. The performing arts and Edison Theater together really combine to bring extra richness to the cultural community at Washington University.

Television has played a lesser role in colleges and universities, although it's inspired some strange behavior. As a graduate student at the University of Chicago, I had two otherwise quite serious co-students who scheduled their entire class load around being able to leave time to watch *I Love Lucy* reruns. I thought this was quite strange, but I do like to think that they were watching some of the episodes of *Lucy* in which Mary Wickes might have played one of her recurring roles.

Film, of course, has been part of the University culture ever since film existed, when even small colleges had film societies. These societies brought to campuses films that might otherwise not be seen at the local movie houses. In those days, before video rental stores and all-movie cable channels, many of us saw our first classic movies in these society events. In fact, I saw my first *Potemkin* and *Casablanca* in a science auditorium which reeked vaguely of chemicals from the lab down the hall.

Of course, in recent decades, film has become truly part of the curriculum. Writing, producing, and acting in plays and film are part of the Performing Arts curriculum. Students have made movies as honors theses here at the University and film has been used in classes from anthropology, history, Asian studies, languages, art, and literature. And indeed faculty at the University are now working together to further define the role of film in our curriculum, responding both to intense student interest and to the centrality of moving images to our culture. Our film and television studies are a critical part of our emerging American Culture Studies Program, which examines American cultural development and its role in the world – which of course can't be seen without film and television.

There are two parts to Mary Wickes' bequest to the Libraries. The first is her memorabilia and papers, which document her long life in theater. And, as Father Richards will tell you, Mary kept everything. She kept the script for every show, notes and autographs from all of the cast members. She filled her small L.A. apartment to

overflowing with materials, which now form a rich collection of primary resources in our Libraries' Special Collections. A potential biographer, who is actually here in the audience, is already poring over those materials and is excited at the richness of these resources. And in our classes, students in Ann Fox's drama class, for example, have been listening to tapes of Mary Wickes, and several of them ended up writing class papers focusing on Mary's career.

The second part of Mary Wickes' bequest to the University Libraries is, as was mentioned, an endowment to support the purchase of library materials, in memory of her parents. We will be buying books, we'll be subscribing to journals, buying films and videos with this endowment, literally forever – beginning with tens and growing quickly to thousands. And over time, hundreds of thousands of items, will be added to our collections. Each will bear an inscription indicating that Mary Wickes made it possible and that it honors her parents. Indeed, now we put that information in our computer records so that now you can search and find this information in our online catalog.

We often hear it said that libraries have no alumni, no intimate and abiding connection with current and former students. And yet, in fact, every student here is an alumnus of the Libraries. All pass through our spaces. They all circulate among the stacks like books. And in the Libraries they meet friends they will carry with them the rest of their lives, whether those friends are human or whether they are ideas.

In the decades since Mary Wickes was a student here, libraries have been racing to catch up with her, expanding our grasp on the world and its history to include photographs, then voice on tapes, then voice and motion in film and video. Today, our students incorporate sound bites and video clips into their “term papers”. Our faculty use them in teaching. This is an astonishing change since Mary’s days as a student here. How great will be the media leap forward from now? Who can tell.

However, our libraries hold the memory of our culture. Nothing goes away for libraries; everything is an add-on. We have papyrus; we have clay tablets; we have illuminated manuscripts. Now we have film and video in our libraries; they have found a home there. In this most generous of gestures, Mary Wickes chose to give back to her University and to generations of students following her a gift of the record of her own career which stretched forward from the now-classic Hollywood to the present. And by establishing a fund in memory of her parents, Mary Wickes nods toward the future and everything that will follow. We are eternally and deeply grateful to Mary for her generosity, and we look forward to hearing more about Mary from her friend and advisor, Father Greg Richards. Father Richards is here from Los Angeles with his son Michael, who is Mary’s godson and we’ll hear something. Welcome, Father.

The Reverend M. Gregory Richards
Trustee of Mary Wickes' Estate

Chancellor Wrighton, Vice Chancellors Baker and Macias, Dr and Mrs. Danforth, dear friends and associates of Mary Wickes and Washington University.

I'm honored to share in this event that would make Mary so very happy. The wonderful opportunities made available by the Isabella and Frank Wickenhauser Memorial Library Fund for Television, Film, and Theater Arts would absolutely exhilarate her. Mary's primary focus since I first came to know her well was a project like this, to do something special for her University and to honor the memory of her parents. Many thanks to all the caring and most competent members of the University professional community who made this event a reality. And since many of the same staff who created this experience will administer Mary's professional memorabilia and financial endowment, I know that this project so close to Mary's heart is in very good hands.

Thank you also for the opportunity given me to speak here about my twenty-five-year journey with Mary Wickes. We spent fifteen years together at All Saints Episcopal Church in Beverly Hills; eight more as I moved from the parish to school ministry at Campbell Hall School in North Hollywood; and the last two years getting to know her better as my family and I have closed her home, sorted through her professional and personal treasures. Our journey with Mary, yours and mine, did not end with her death in October two years ago. As you will hopefully agree, today marks the beginning of another leg of our journey, as Mary's influence, artistry, and generosity continue.

For two years, My wife Debbie and I, assisted by my assistant and Mary's friend from All-Saints Church days, discovered, evaluated, sorted, stacked, filed, boxed, and dispatched Mary's memorabilia. All the treasures of her professional career are housed in the Archives of this University's great library. They stand as physical signs and evidence of the very full life of Mary Wickes.

I want to share some of what my family and I have learned about Mary during the process of discovery and decision-making. Just as we had to choose categories in sorting through her professional records, I've chosen titles for the purpose of sharing with you today.

The first category is private life. Mary enjoyed elegance, but she lived simply, in a one-bedroom condominium in Century City, west of Los Angeles proper – Hollywood, Beverly Hills. She like to keep things. Most of her furniture now resides with the state history museum a few blocks from here, after generations of service to Mary's family. Mary drove a big old Ford LTD until her failing eyesight precluded her driving. She still used the original dial telephone that came with her apartment. She bought quality but plain clothing, then embellished each piece by hand with sequins, lace, and other decorations. She always dressed elegantly, but she used her artistic genius and knowledge of costume, rather than her checkbook, to create that elegance. She was concerned about her finances. First, she was concerned that there be enough to provide for long-term care, should she ever require it. Second, and more urgent to her, she

wanted to honor and memorialize her parents, to provide her University the extraordinary gift we gather to celebrate today. She just wouldn't spend much of anything on herself, certainly not beyond the most basic necessities; preferring to invest her wealth for the future endowment, some two million dollars, for her beloved Washington University.

Most of us who knew the private Mary Wickes also knew her moral integrity. She hated phoniness in any relationship. One of her fellow nuns in *Sister Act*, Susan Johnson, told me after Mary died that Mary was legally blind and selectively deaf. She didn't have the ability or the stomach to listen to anything that didn't stand up to her ethical principles. She simply edited out the undignified and the inappropriate. She refused lucrative contracts for parts in television programs or films that denigrated humanity in general or any profession in particular. She was so significant in her business that she could reserve the option to refuse changes in original scripts that she found morally objectionable. Mary's nuns and nurses always have the stamp of her integrity, her art imitating her life. In the words of my wife, "Mary was not the Hollywood type. There was no Hollywood story here." Indeed the only tabloid coverage Mary received was commendation for her career and professional service.

Dignity also marked Mary's private life. She was in charge of her own destiny. She survived the deaths of her parents, her own battles with serious cancer, diminishing vision and balance, virtually alone. I was most honored when she trusted me enough to call on me when she needed a listening ear. And she was a trusted friend of our family and most supportive of my wife, our two sons, and me. I'm grateful that Mary never had

to compromise her dignity. She never had to give up her home. She continued up to her high standards until the very day she entered the hospital in those last weeks. She took charge of the direction of her medical care and maintained control, even guiding the treatment at the end through previously written instructions. Her age was nobody's business. I remember one review of her performance in a great musical in Los Angeles. The reviewer referred to her with the phrase, "... and dear old Mary Wickes ...". She was livid. She was never old. She refused to give her age to doctors and other professionals who she didn't feel needed to know. She put a small Band-Aid over her age on her passport. There are no dates on her grave marker at Shiloh cemetery – though she had told me she was going to put as an epitaph, "I told you I was sick". But she was proud that there were no dates of birth or death on that grave marker. Somehow against my better efforts as a trustee, her death certificate understates her age by seven years. One flustered Los Angeles news anchor, reporting on her death, commented, "Well, Miss Wickes' age is disputed." She maintained her dignity to the last day and beyond.

I label the second category of discoveries about Mary Wickes as "community life". We gather today in the cradle of Mary's sense of community, Washington University, and near the home a few blocks away, where she grew up. In these last years, Mary had few blood relatives left, none in California and a beloved cousin and her son here in St. Louis. So Mary created family. She adopted me my first week in the parish in Beverly Hills. She would craft items and cook specialties for us and others. Her pate, spaghetti sauce, brownies, and lemon bars often adorned tables in our home and table in the parish hall. Some people, it is said, make their own temperate weather wherever they are. Mary built

community, made family, wherever she went. The most significant of her extended families, as I have come to understand in the past two years, is here, in St. Louis, at the University. I've discovered that not only as I've sorted her memorabilia, but also as I have come to know your community and its story. Mary was dedicated to serving others. Many of them became extended family, too. The actress known to portray happy nurses and nuns found herself fulfilled giving volunteer service in hospital and church. Her parents and Washington University gave her a love of education – achieving it and providing it. While teaching very fortunate sixth graders in Sunday school or graduate students in college, she was dynamic. Of course, who would dare look away while she was talking.

Mary taught acting at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, The College of William and Mary, and here. After she received her honorary doctorate from Washington University, she enrolled in the masters degree program in drama at UCLA. Her master's thesis was on the architecture of your opera house here. She never took an acting class, even at UCLA – they wouldn't hear of it. She learned through what she called her “wonderful living textbook”. We all know that it was a classic. And it began here, when her English professor convinced her to audition for a play. That beloved professor, and her successful premiere performance, reflect another facet of the community that nurtured her and that she helped nurture at Washington University. I recently heard Chancellor Wrighton speak in Los Angeles. He described the historical mission of the University – to build community among the students and faculty and to nudge students beyond their own academic programs, majors, and interests.

Undergraduate students in liberal arts do research at the medical school, or they audition for the performing arts.

One of the reasons Mary Wickes is so loved here, I am sure, is because she lived out your vision for your students. You accomplished your mission in her. The career of Mary Wickes is a monument to your good work for students. You gave meaning to her in her youth, and she identified to the end with young people, their aspirations and challenges. Perhaps that helps account for her de-emphasis of chronological age. A bumper sticker contains the thought Mary lived out: "It's never too late to have a happy childhood." Of course, any creative, imaginative person requires a strong and healthy inner child. Mary delighted in youth, including her own.

Private life, community life, and professional life. This third category of Mary Wickes, her art, her craft, is best known to us. The memorable video we've just experienced a few moments ago – and I'm glad I had a chance to see it in Los Angeles before I came because I think I would have been too emotional, maybe, to go on – that great video testifies to the reason we and the world loved Mary and celebrate her sixty-five years on stage, screen, and television, sixty-five years. Fan mail continued to arrive in significant number the first year after her death, decreasing to a few letters through the second year. Fans even included communities of nuns and Cardinal Krol of Philadelphia. Many of these letters were touching and inspiring. Of course, in many ways she still lives on for her fans in her work, and will continue to have an impact on fans of all ages. We have answered every letter, as Mary always did -- she responded to everything a fan ever

wrote – and sent photographs when requested. Several fans sent their condolences. One eccentric enthusiast requested some thing - *anything* - of Mary's. When the cleaning and sorting got us bleary-eyed, we would often laugh as some odd object would appear and we'd consider sending it to that fan.

Mary could be so patient with her fans. When we would walk to lunch in Beverly Hills, people would stop to ask for her autograph, and to inquire if I were “real”, as opposed, I guess, to a cleric from central casting. I watched her clown around with Lucille Ball for fans, improvising props in a stairwell. Once in Hollywood after a performance of *Oklahoma!*, she and Jamie Farr boarded a charter bus filled with senior citizens and rode with them through the intersection of Hollywood and Vine. While she could be painfully patient with a naive fan, Mary could be extremely impatient with the unprofessional conduct of those in her business. One of her favorite targets was any inexperienced casting director who would ask something like, “Well, Mary, tell me - what have you done?”. Her retort: “You first.”

Tom Bosley, her Father Dowling, wrote of Mary soon after her death,

“When I was a young actor, just starting out, I was given some sound advice when I joined my first stock company. I was told to find a Mary Wickes type in the company, and that she would see that our checks didn't bounce, we'd have heat when it was cold and air conditioning when it was hot, and clean lavatories.”

“When I got into my sixties and had my own television show,” Tom Bosley wrote,

“I was fortunate to face the real Mary Wickes, who saw to it that we got overtime if it was due, that we got heat if the set was cold, that we got air conditioning if the set was hot, and that we had clean lavatories.

He concluded: “She was a born leader. Oh how each of us needs a Mary Wickes type in our life, and how we miss her.” She was such a role model for members of her own profession, for young people, for us all.

When she gave your first Starbird Lecture here at the University a decade ago – a decade ago this spring, actually – she spoke of a young Olympian who had been injured in the days before his cross country race in the Mexico City Olympics. The doctors patched him together and he ran. When he finished the race fourteen hours later than the rest of the pack, a reporter asked him why he’d done it – run when there was no chance to win a medal. The athlete explained, “My country didn’t send me here just to run a race, but to finish it.” Most of us in this room know why this story touched Mary. She ran and completed her race with dignity, with class. She ran looking toward this day, when she could somehow repay her parents for their sacrifices, guidance, patience, and love – repay them in a big way, repay them in a place they all loved: Washington University. Of course the work of Mary Wickes is her greatest tribute: the roles she created on the Broadway stage, on the silver screen; the hundreds of television episodes she made; all the examples of what she called “the serious business” of doing comedy – these stand in tribute to Mary Wickes.

Her professional life also continues in the creation of the endowment for the libraries’ research and archives in television, film, and theater. She will continue to teach her craft

and continue to influence the young people of future generations through the various media of Washington University's libraries. She also continues to work, gainfully I might add. As recently as this week her agent and I signed a contract for a new Walt Disney picture project featuring Mary's voice as lead singer in a song used in *Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The lion's share of this and all her royalties and residuals, of course, comes to the Wickenhauser Memorial Library Fund, to Washington University – where her influence continues to be felt and where the work closest to her heart goes forward.

I will leave your community today with a sense of peace for a dear friend and mentor, Mary Wickes. Her prize possessions and the fruits of her professional labors are housed at home now, in St. Louis. Everything is just as she wanted it to be and where she wanted it to be – close to her heart, and to the heart of her parents, at home.

Since I picture her now with her arms crossed, eyes locked on mine, finger pointing to her watch as she nods her head dramatically – I must stop. And I know exactly what she would say at this point:

“Enough of all this. Let's have some laughs!”.

Shirley Baker

Thank you, Father Richards. We all feel we know Mary from her movies and her television, but it's important to us to hear from someone who knew her well as a friend. Now please join us for some food and drink, and some laughs, we hope.

[end of program]