From a drawing, building speaks to her in poetry
Housekeeper's verse now keeps watch at Bryn Mawr College.

By Wendy Walker INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF
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Mary Wilson, a housekeeper at Bryn Mawr College, would be the first to acknowledge that she doesn't always keep her mind on her job.

That's because she is also a poet. and little things she sees while mopping and dusting - such as the model of a brain in a biology professor's office - often inspire her.

"I go walking down the hall, and I'll be thinking about the right words," she said. "Then, when I go on break, I'll be scribbling it all down on a piece of paper."

College officials heard about her talent, and Denise Romano, director of housekeeping, asked her to write a poem about the new Ward Building, which houses the college's facilities services, housekeeping and purchasing departments.

"I said, 'It's not built yet. How am I going to write about a building that doesn't exist?'" Wilson recalled.

But after reviewing sketches of the proposed building, watching as it was being built and asking other housekeepers for their ideas, she crafted her poem and showed it to the building's architect, Richard Conway Meyer.

"He thought it was wonderful," she said. "He said it captured what he wanted it to look like."

Her poem can now be found on a plaque inside the 27,000-square-foot Ward Building, named for James A. Ward, head of Bryn Mawr's grounds department from 1952 to 1977.

She said the poem had no title: "I couldn't name it. It's just dedicated to the Ward Building."

Wilson, who has two children and a grandson, has been a housekeeper at the college for 13 years. Vito Barbuto, her supervisor, said Wilson was an exemplary employee: "Mary will go anywhere and do anything with no complaints, as long as you say, 'Would you do this?' and 'Thank you.'"

Twice a week, Wilson takes writing and grammar classes with Dottie Gallo, an administrative assistant in Bryn Mawr's office for institutional diversity, as part of the college's adult-literacy program.

"She's an excellent student," Gallo said. "She really works at it and does a lot of work on her own."

Wilson said she had no pattern for her writing, sometimes starting at the middle or end of a poem.

"When I'm writing, I get excited," Wilson said. "It's like I'm putting down everything I'm thinking about. . . . I like to see it shape up until it's what I want."

In addition to her poems, she has written two children's books, (A Day to Remember and Rudolph and the Flying Elves.) but said she had received nothing but rejection letters from the publishers to whom she has sent them.

"They say I have to get an agent," she said. "So I guess I'm looking for an agent."

Paul Grobstein, the biology professor whose brain model inspired her poem "Tidal Wave," has posted some of
her poems on his Web site - serendip.bryn

maur.edu - and said he often discussed Wilson's poetry with her.

She told him that the deep curves in the brain reminded her of tidal waves. Grobstein said he suggested to her that a tidal wave could also be a metaphor for the shift in thought required to think of a person as nothing more than his or her gray matter.

Richard Willard, the college's director of instrument design, has some of her work posted in his office.

"I love her poems," he said. "I really get a lot out of them, and I'm not into poetry. They just do something for me."

Send People news to suburban staff writer Wendy Walker, The Inquirer, 120 N. High St., West Chester, Pa. 19380: e-mail it to PApeople@phillynews.com; or fax to 610-701-7630. Contact Wendy Walker at 610-701-7651 or wwalker@phillynews.com.

Public Service

Donations for Military Personnel Wayne Senior Center seeks individuals to send letters, non perishables, toiletries to troops in Gulf. 108 Station Rd. Wayne; 610-688-6246. www.wayneseniorkcenter.com. Call center for details & mailing address.

Food Drive Interfaith Coalition of Food Centers in Delaware County accepting donations at various locations. Call for specific locations. Main Office: 700 Morton Ave. Chester; 610-874-4132.


West Whiteland Twp. Parks & Recreation Discount tickets to area ski resorts at Rec Dept. Call ahead before pick-up. 110 West Boot Rd. Exton; 610-363-9525.

Volunteer Calls

Churchville Nature Center Volunteers to help with special events, children's activities, clerical & support work. More. Volunteers ages 13 & up to participate in the Center's Summer Clubs. 501 Churchville Ln. Churchville; 215-357-4005.

Girl Scouts of Freedom Valley One time & year long services needed: guest, special interest, & troop leaders. Girl Scouts of Freedom Valley. 100 Juliette Low Way, Valley Forge; 888-244-4452.

Religion Calendar


Main Line Unitarian Church 816 S Valley Forge Rd, Devon; 610-896-7566.

Penn Wynne Presbyterian Church 130 Haverford Rd, Wynnewood; 610-642-1308. www/ifb.com/pwpc. "Thank God It's Friday Mom's Survival Group." 9 a.m. Fris (except during school vacations).

St Peter's Church in the Great Valley Church Rd, between Swedesford & Yellow Springs Rds, Paoli; 610-644-2261. www.stpetersvg.org. Sunday School. 10:10 a.m. Suns. Adult Bible Study & open forum. Sessions between 9 a.m. & 11 a.m. Sun services. Wed Morning Bible Study. 10 a.m. Weds.

Temple Brith Achim 481 S Gulf Rd, King of Prussia; 610-337-2222. www.uahc.org/cons/pa/pa019. Powell Religious School: Preschool-grade 6 (8:30 & 11 a.m. Suns), Grades 3-6 (4:30 & 6:15 p.m. Weds). Grade 7 (6 p.m. Tues), Grades 8-10 (7 p.m. Tues). Shabbat services. 7:30 p.m. Fris & 10:30 a.m. Sat. Call for other programs including choirs, cradle roll.
Meetings

The Art League Art discussions. Main Line Chamber of Commerce (Conference Center). 175 Strafford Ave (Suite 230), Wayne; 610-859-0765. 1 p.m. 2d Fri of month.

Barnes & Noble 150 W Swedesford Rd, Devon; 610-695-6600. French Conversation 7 p.m. Weds Spirituality Book Group. 7 p.m. 2d Mon of month. Theater Talk. 7 p.m. 2d Tue of month. Creative Writing. 7:30 p.m. 2d Thu of month. Spanish Conversation. 7 p.m. 3d Tue of month. Fiction Book Group. 7 p.m. 3d Wed of month. Poets Here & Now. 7 p.m. 3d Thu of month. Journaling Workshops. 7 p.m. last Tue of month Living on Purpose. 7 p.m. last Thu of month

Book Discussion Group Newtown Library, Bishop Hollow Rd, Newtown; 610-356-7981. 2 p.m. 3d Sun of month.

Borders Books 1149 Lancaster Ave. Bryn Mawr; 610-527-1500. Shakespeare discussion group. 7:30 p.m. 7/10.

Hebrew Speaking Group Open to all who wish to practice speaking Hebrew. Borders, 80 E Wynnewood Ave, Wynnewood; 610-642-0362. 7-9 p.m. Weds.

LeTip Great Valley business networking group meets. New members welcome. Chester County Chamber of Business & Industry. 1600 Paoli Pike, Malvern; 610-458-8311. 7-8 a.m. Tues.

Main Line Stitchers American Needlepoint chapter meets. St Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church. 203 N Valley Forge Rd, Devon; 610-647-4462. 7:15 p.m. 2d Mon of month except July & Aug.

No Kidding! Chester County social group for adults without children holds various events. 610-486-6858. www.chesco.nokidding.net.

Speakers Club Sunday Breakfast Speakers Club, Wyndham Suites Hotel, 888 Chesterbrook Blvd, Wayne; 610-408-8351. 8:45 a.m. 3d Sun of month.

*FREE* Tri-County Business Network For professionals in Delco, Chesco & Montco: continental breakfast included. Prudential Realtors, 216 Lancaster Ave, Wayne; 610-892-1166. 7:30 a.m. 1st Wed of month.

University Women American Assoc of Univer Women/Valley Forge chapter. Tredyffrin Library. 582 Upper Gulph Rd, Wayne; 610-296-9392.

Seminars & Classes

Main Line Art Center All-age art classes, workshops. Old Buck Rd & Lancaster Ave, Haverford; 610-525-0272. Call for days, times, fees. Registration required.

Women's Resource Center 113 W Wayne Ave, Wayne; 610-687-6391. Programs for women in transition. Registration required.

Snapshot

Mary Wilson

Age: "Over 50."

Occupation: She has been a housekeeper at Bryn Mawr College for 13 years. Her hours are 5:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., and she works out at the college gym at lunchtime.

Residence: Philadelphia, about a 15-minute drive from the campus.

Hobbies: "I like to read. all sorts of books." She just finished a book about Rosa Parks.

Ward Building poem:

Strong steel beams dug into earth.

Crossing over beam into beam.
Wide windows letting sunlight stream through.
An atmosphere of comfort.
Lighting friendliness inside.
From office to office as the beams hold the
Structure in place.
A community of workers joined as one.
It is through strength and durability
With one purpose in mind -
Doing our jobs, mastering the challenge.
Directors and trades working hand in hand.
Reaching towards a common goal -
To keep Bryn Mawr College at its finest.

Illustration/Photo: Twice a week, Wilson takes writing instruction from Dottie Gallo (left) of the college. Wilson says she often lets her mind wander while on the job, and objects she cleans may give rise to poetry.

RON TARVER / Inquirer Staff Photographer

Mary Wilson wrote the poem that is displayed on a plaque at Bryn Mawr College’s new Ward Building. She says the poem had no title:

“I couldn’t name it. It’s just dedicated to the Ward Building.” The architect says her verse described the building he envisioned.

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