



34 *blank for a few seconds. When audio and video return, Judge Hancock is seated with a guitar*  
35 *next to the podium.]*

36 JUDGE HANCOCK: Sue Ellen [Owens Williams] asked me a few minutes ago what was  
37 I going to sing, and I told her I'd given much thought to it and thought that maybe I would do an  
38 opening number by this group called Three Six Mafia [*audience laughter*]. But given the nature  
39 of the occasion, and given the person who is receiving this honor, Elizabeth Wilson, who is a  
40 hero, I thought that I would do this number. [*Plays guitar and sings "The Wind Beneath My*  
41 *Wings."*] [*Audience applause*] Thank you. [*Plays and sings "A Wonderful World."*] [*Audience*  
42 *applause*] [*Judge Hancock leaves podium; Sue Ellen Owens Williams, Director of the DeKalb*  
43 *History Center, comes up to podium and addresses the audience.*]

44 MS. WILLIAMS: I'm glad it wasn't that "Mafia" thing. [*Audience laughter*] Thank you,  
45 Michael. That was beautiful. Right before we get into the program, I want to ask you to check  
46 those cell phones because we're videoing; and we don't want the sound of cell phones in the  
47 background. So please check those. And also, just for Juanchella [Grooms, then community  
48 liaison for Decatur Police Department; now Juanchella Grooms Francis], who has all of the  
49 books that are on our tables as decoration on her library card [*audience laughter*], please don't  
50 think that they are available for you to take home and read.

51 I want you to just take a minute and look around the room. Just take a minute and look  
52 around the room at the people who are here. Not up front--look way back there. Look here,  
53 look over here. Like, really turn your necks, you know, to look around the room. If you look  
54 around the room, you really can't keep it straight ahead. I just want you to look around the  
55 room. It is a wonderful world. [*Reads lyrics of gospel hymn as an invocation of blessing.*]

56 There's a sweet, sweet spirit in this place. And I know that it's the spirit of the Lord.  
57 There are sweet expressions on each face. And I know that it's the presence of the  
58 Lord.

59 Sweet Holy Spirit, sweet Heavenly dove, stay right here with us, filling us with your love.  
60 And for each blessing we lift our hearts in praise. Without a doubt we'll know,  
61 When leave this place, that we have been revived.

62  
63 Thank you for the food, thank you for the people, thank you for the sweet, sweet spirit. Amen.

64 The DeKalb History Center, in 2000, devised, came up with the idea of the History  
65 Maker Award. We were very specific in what we wanted it to be. We wanted it to be a  
66 recognition for someone whose courageous actions had forever changed the face of a  
67 community and its people. We were very clear that we did not want an award given to someone  
68 that was an elected official—[*To the audience*] no offense to elected officials [*Audience*  
69 *laughter*]. We didn't want it to be for someone necessarily that the whole world knew, and it was

70 not necessarily to be for someone whose actions at the time everybody thought were wonderful.  
71 In fact, in most of the cases, as we've looked at the people, the actions at the time were not  
72 necessarily received by all with great favor, with applause, with praise. In fact, they were  
73 challenged openly. In 2000 we gave our History Maker Award to Jamie Mackay, a name that  
74 some of you will know well and others of you will say, "Who is Jamie Mackay?" Jamie Mackay  
75 had actions of courageous—much courage to change the face of the way DeKalb County  
76 government operated and was very instrumental in the busing of DeKalb County schools  
77 [students] and many other things where he met a lot of challenges. I'm very pleased to let you  
78 know that tonight Jamie's wife—Jamie left us; we don't have his sweet spirit with us anymore,  
79 except as we feel his presence—Sara Mackay is here tonight, along with Betty Asbury, Jamie  
80 Mackay's sister. And Jamie received the first-ever History Maker Award. So Sara and Betty, if  
81 you'll stand so we can give you recognition. [*Camera pans audience; the ladies stand to*  
82 *audience applause.*]

83 We also determined that we wouldn't give this thing every year. We don't want it to  
84 become something that is rote and that you have to sit around wondering who you're going to  
85 give it to this year. We will decide at the proper time when the Spirit moves us to give an award.  
86 So in 2004 the Spirit moved us again, and we gave our award to Sally Harbaugh, again a name  
87 that some of you will know and others of you will wonder, "Who is Sally Harbaugh?" Sally  
88 Harbaugh was instrumental in saving the Olmstead Parks that line Ponce de Leon, again  
89 forever changing the face of the community of Druid Hills, the City of Atlanta, and DeKalb  
90 County. Again, not a popular decision going against the DOT, a former President [Jimmy  
91 Carter], Andrew Young—I mean all sorts of folks; but she took the courage of her actions.

92 Again in 2006 we came up with our desire—Spirit came again, and it was to honor  
93 Elizabeth Wilson, again whose actions changed the face of the community forever. Judy Turner  
94 and Mayor Floyd were the cochairs—honorary cochairs of this event, and Judy will take us  
95 through the rest of the program. [*Audience applauds as Sue Ellen Williams steps away from the*  
96 *podium and Judy Turner takes her place.*]

97 JUDY TURNER: Good afternoon. It's wonderful to see all of you here. We were kind of  
98 afraid we were going to have to stack people on top of each other. So, if you're a little crowded,  
99 we apologize; but it's because of the love and the thanks that we all feel for Elizabeth that so  
100 many of you are here.

101 I have the privilege tonight of introducing our speakers. We've asked just a very small  
102 group of people to talk about the impact that Elizabeth's actions have had on them. And the first

103 person that we're going to ask to come up is Coach Carter Wilson. [*Audience applause as Ms.*  
104 *Turner leaves the podium and Coach Wilson takes his place there.*]

105 COACH CARTER WILSON: Thank you, Judy. It is indeed a pleasure to have so many  
106 people who've had a hand in our raising to be here tonight to share in this wonderful occasion  
107 with us. I guess you're wondering why I'm here talking on behalf of the Wilson children and not  
108 my older brother. Well, I guess you all know he's long-winded, and this occasion would turn into  
109 an HBO special [*audience laughter*] if indeed he had the opportunity to speak. So I guess,  
110 being the next in line, this fell on my shoulders; and I'm glad to be able to do it.

111 Now, one of the things that I do as a basketball coach, I have the opportunity to speak all  
112 over the country to different groups about offense, defense, many aspects of the game of  
113 basketball. And one question that comes up invariably from young coaches is, "What does it  
114 take to be successful?" And invariably we always get down to what do you believe in. [*Judge*  
115 *Hancock's guitar falls over behind the podium. As Ms. Turner and Judge Hancock come up to*  
116 *move it, Coach Wilson holds up both hands and addresses Judge Hancock.*] Excuse me,  
117 Judge! [*Audience laughter*] What do you believe in as a coach?

118 Tonight I wanted to have the opportunity to talk about Elizabeth Wilson and some of the  
119 things that she stands for. Well, as I started preparing for this, I came to the realization that I  
120 would be here all night if I talked about all of the things that she stood for as a person and all of  
121 the great things she's done for us, for people in the community, and for the city of Decatur at  
122 large. So I won't do that. But I do think it's important that we do talk about a few of the things  
123 that are special to us as her children, things that we really believe that makes her even more  
124 special than she really, really is.

125 And the first thing I came up with is her ability to lead. Her leadership ability is  
126 something that stands head and shoulders above anything that I've ever experienced. See, as  
127 a basketball coach, one of the things that I'm charged to do is to motivate young people. So I  
128 study leaders all of the time. I study social leaders: Martin Luther King, I study Gandhi. I study  
129 leaders in business: John H. Johnson, Lee Iacocca, the Turners—Ted and Judy [*audience*  
130 *laughter*]. Even I study basketball coaches—John Wooten. And the one thing that she  
131 [Elizabeth Wilson] shares with all of them is the ability to get people to do things that they may  
132 not know that they're going to do. [*Audience laughter*] I would venture a guess that everybody  
133 in this room has done at least one thing that they weren't sure that they would do; but she called  
134 and say, "You know, Carter, I need you." And you got to come. You got to come running. And  
135 her leadership ability is something that stands out no matter what.

136           You know, I remember a few years ago, we were on vacation, and we were having a  
137 great time. At the time, you know, we were normal people. Valerie and I, we were on vacation;  
138 and she [Elizabeth Wilson] happened to be on vacation with us. Well, the conversation started  
139 that morning. Valerie and I were getting up, and she said, “You know, Ms. Wilson is talking  
140 about this school board thing.” I said, “Look, if you don’t want to run for the school board, don’t  
141 run for the school board.” Well, later that night, after a walk on the beach, she [Valerie Wilson]  
142 came back and said, “I’m putting my name in the hat.” [Audience laughter] And that’s the kind  
143 of leader that she’s [Elizabeth Wilson] always been—not one that’s in your face, but the kind of  
144 leader that leads quietly from behind, sort of like Nelson Mandela, getting people to lead and do  
145 the things that you want them to do, but never in their faces and always with a smile. And we’re  
146 certainly appreciative of that leadership ability.

147           Now, the second thing that stands out is the ability to fight. If you know her at all, you  
148 know that there’s going to be a fight. As a matter of fact, the Wilson family motto is, “If you see  
149 a good fight, get in it.” [Audience laughter] She’s taught us that from, you know, from library  
150 days, school board days, city—all of those things. If you see a good fight, then you must get in  
151 it. You know, one of the things in dealing with my team, you know, invariably we’re always  
152 asking kids to do something that they may not really believe that they can do. And I always tell  
153 them the story about fighting. Well, a few years ago, when I was the head basketball coach at  
154 Georgia State, she asked me, “You know, I’m going to have a little procedure done at the  
155 hospital. Why don’t you just pick me up and take me down, and you can pick me up later.”  
156 Fine, no problem at all. Well, as I picked her up, we’re sitting there in a room waiting on the  
157 doctor. The doctor comes in, and I’m thinking everything is OK. And the doctor looks around.  
158 She [Elizabeth] says, “Look, that’s my son. Anything you need to say, you can say it in front of  
159 him. It’s no big deal.” Well, at that moment, the doctor gave her the news that she had breast  
160 cancer. Now, it was the most amazing thing that I’d ever seen in my life. The next words out of  
161 her mouth were, “That just gives me one more thing to fight.” No emotions, no crying, no any of  
162 that. One more thing to fight. And ever since that moment I knew in my DNA there was  
163 something that says that you have to fight. You must be a fighter. Every time we have a  
164 basketball game now, in the corner of my game report, we ask the kids, “Who you going to  
165 represent for?” Now, I know that’s not correct English, but that’s what the kids understand.  
166 “Who you going to represent for?” And every one of them will put the initials of somebody that’s  
167 important to them on their sneakers. Just initials, no big deal. But that’s the person that’s going  
168 to motivate you and get you to do the things that you can’t do. On my game report, every game,

169 I write the initials “E.W.” That lets me know that, hey, if it’s going to be a fight, let me get in it.  
170 And I would certainly be glad to do that.

171 And one final thing that stands out to us, as her children and grandchildren, is the ability  
172 to share. You know, and I know that sounds like a very simple thing. You know, I’m not talking  
173 about the sharing where you’re in the sandbox and play nice and doing all of that kind of stuff.  
174 I’m talking about real sharing, where you’ve got to give of your time and give of your talents.  
175 That’s one of the things she’s always done. You know, growing up she was always the one  
176 that’s got to go to the meeting, “I got to go see about this,” “I got to do all of these things.”

177 And our question was—and, you know, at the time we were children, and we were  
178 selfish—“Why? Why do you have to be the one to go every single time?”

179 And her answer fifty years ago is the same answer that she gives right now as she’s  
180 dealing with issues in the city, “You know, I need to help Ms. So-and-so with her taxes” or “Ms.  
181 So-and-so’s house is not where it needs to be, and we need to give her some help.”

182 “Mom, why do you have to do that?”

183 And the answer simply is, “It needs to be done.”

184 It needs to be done. And I urge all of you—and the challenge for all of us—children,  
185 people in the community, everybody—is let’s make sure that the things that need to be done,  
186 that we will continue to do. Let that be her legacy. Thank you. [*Audience applauds as Coach  
187 Wilson leaves the podium. He and his mother hug before he returns to his seat. Ms. Turner  
188 goes to the podium and speaks.*]

189 MS. TURNER: Thank you, Carter. Richard [presumably Coach Wilson’s older brother]  
190 couldn’t have said it better. [*She and audience laugh.*] We appreciate that. Our next speaker is  
191 Ms. Sadie Sims, who was with Elizabeth as she decided that she wanted her children to go to  
192 the same school and have the same privileges that the other children in Decatur had. Ms.  
193 Sims? [*Ms. Turner leaves the podium, and Ms. Sims is escorted up by her daughter Doris, last  
194 name unknown.*]

195 DORIS: Like Carter just said, I got a phone call about a month ago from Ms. Wilson:  
196 “Doris, I need you.” [*She and audience laugh.*] So we’re here. And this is my mom, Sadie  
197 Sims.

198 MS. SIMS: I’ve been knowing Sis [Ms. Wilson] since she come to Decatur. I’m a much  
199 older person than she is. But we just—she was always a person willing to do or work with the  
200 schools and the kindergarten. Her children—and I had children in kindergarten together But she  
201 was always there. And when at school they was always there, because I had children along  
202 with her, which—then I have children—[inaudible—could be “some” or “son”] the oldest

203 [inaudible]. But she took to me as a mother. And we always, when--anything to be done, she  
204 did it. With me being an older person that I know the way. We would go to the schools or the  
205 PTA, I'd always be there. And so she was always, you know, be there. She was the president  
206 of the PTA and organized everything. You know, she was interested in her children. And I was,  
207 too. I had older children. But she was always there. And she always looked to me as a  
208 mother. And I just come to-- When our schools, well, they built the schools, but we had only  
209 one school [for children of color], and they had five white schools. But we didn't have anything  
210 in our school. They never did complete this school. And our children didn't have books, didn't  
211 have desks, didn't have typewriters or anything in the school. And so children would always tell  
212 us what they didn't have. We didn't have books. But we would— But when they built the new  
213 school, we decided to— We don't have anything over here to worry about. We all go to the  
214 new school.

215 And some of my friends—I have worked in the schools over—I have worked in the  
216 schools, but I just know what was in the schools. But they was really-- But there wasn't nothing  
217 we could do about it. But had plenty friends told me what we should have in the school. And I  
218 know because I have worked in the other school. But Sis was a person that—when they told  
219 them that our children could—they were building the school, and they couldn't build it unless  
220 they integrated. But when they told us-- Then we had to go over there and sign up. And we got  
221 four or five--six or seven mothers to say that they will sign up for their children to go to the new  
222 school. Nobody showed up but Sis and me. [*She and audience laugh.*] And me being an older  
223 person. And [inaudible] scared of, and I said, "That school was built because we don't have  
224 anything." And really, I feel if they know what we have over here, they don't—they really don't  
225 know. Hadn't been anybody over there to see. And me and Sis went over there, and we—they  
226 called on me to tell. "Now I want to send my children to the school—to Decatur High School." I  
227 told them what we didn't have at Trinity High School, and they didn't believe it. And I told them  
228 to go over there to see. And they come over there surprised to see that we didn't have  
229 anything. Didn't have--in the Home Ec room a old stove, one stove. Didn't have gas and  
230 electric stove. Need to have a refrigerator. When they had food, they get one-- In the Home Ec  
231 class they did a roast—one roast, and cooked and have it there to show [inaudible]. Put it back  
232 in the refrigerator and show, you know. Like in another school I know, in the other school when  
233 they have cooked the roast, they would eat it, you know, the children would eat it. [*Audience*  
234 *laughter*] We just had one to show. [*Audience laughter*] And they couldn't believe it. And they  
235 come over there and checked and seen that we didn't have anything over there, and they

236 decided that--to complete the school—that our children had—they had to integrate the school.  
237 When they get it finished, our children could go.

238           But when the time come, time to go, nobody showed up but me and Sis, Carter, and my  
239 three children--my three daughters. But my son didn't want to go. Didn't want to go to Decatur  
240 High. But he was on the football team, and they stayed, and then we integrated. And  
241 integration went on real nice. The children—of course, they are—we went to a Presbyterian  
242 church, and we would have Bible school in summertime. Agnes Scott and the [Columbia]  
243 seminary and Decatur churches would come out and have Bible school, and our children—the  
244 white children would come over and teach our children. And we had a good relationship with  
245 the children. But if it wasn't for Sis, I guess I wouldn't have went by myself. [*Ms. Sims and*  
246 *audience laugh.*]

247           And so she—we integrated the library, everything else. And just all of it—she was  
248 ready. And I mean, she didn't—she just did it in the nicest way. She didn't—wasn't demanding,  
249 no. But we—I mean—so I know—you—let them know you was for betterment of the children.  
250 Not just something just to hurt somebody. Just because you want the children to go to school.  
251 But [inaudible] she did, too. And I did, too. We just wanted better for our children and let  
252 them— She was always—anything we could do to better the community, the children, the  
253 churches, and everything else. Anything to better the children, our children. Her children—  
254 mine—her children were real small. My children was teenagers. She was right there with me.  
255 And she was all we had, just—just a worker for the community. And I see the reason her  
256 children did so good, because she helped everybody else. [*Audience applause. Ms. Sims's*  
257 *daughter Doris takes the microphone.*]

258           DORIS [last name unknown]: I'll just tell you, my mom is ninety years old; so we're very  
259 proud of that. But the one thing, being one of that first group who voluntarily went to Decatur  
260 after this gallant effort, that I know that in this room tonight—and I've just been smiling all this  
261 evening, because anybody that's in here that was at Decatur High when it was first integrated  
262 and graduated after those years and thereafter, regardless of race, ethnicity, anything else, just  
263 stand up, because these are the products of that effort that happened when the schools in the  
264 city of Decatur integrated. [*Several people stand, to audience applause. As Ms. Sims and her*  
265 *daughter rejoin the audience, Ms. Turner takes the podium.*]

266           MS. TURNER: Thank you, Ms. Sims, for being with us tonight and for being with  
267 Elizabeth and helping change history. We have another very special lady who was involved in  
268 one of the significant community changes, and that's Ms. Sally Daniels [sic], who is going to talk  
269 about the library. Ms. Daniels [sic]?



270 [Recording pauses while Ms. Daniel makes her way to the podium, then resumes as Ms.  
271 Daniels begins to speak.]

272 MS. DANIEL: I'm deaf as a post and blind as a bat. Can you hear me all right?  
273 [Audience responds with laughter; Ms. Daniel also laughs.] All right. There was something  
274 called the Georgia Council on Human Relations. I don't know exactly when it started—  
275 sometime in the late '50s—but there was—we started a DeKalb branch of it. [Ms. Daniel is  
276 erroneously identified with name superimposed onscreen in white letters as "Sallie Daniels."]  
277 And I was asked to be the chair of the DeKalb Council on Human Relations. We had three  
278 things that we wanted to do. One of them was to desegregate the library. Can you imagine that  
279 African-American citizens could not go to the library in the '60s and before? There was  
280 something called a "bookmobile" that went into the black neighborhoods. And if you wanted a  
281 book, you had to be sure and get the date the bookmobile came to your neighborhood. There  
282 was something that we were also going to put in—streets, paved streets and sewers in the  
283 Lynwood Park area, which is near Oglethorpe University. And I don't even remember what the  
284 third thing was.

285 But the important thing was the library. Well, Elizabeth and I were the ones who were  
286 going to do it. Translation: Elizabeth did it. I was scared stiff [audience laughter]. I stayed out  
287 in my car, ostensibly to be the runaway [getaway] if she came running out [audience laughter].  
288 But, as it happened, about ten, fifteen minutes went by, and Elizabeth came out with books.  
289 There wasn't a fight. It was as simple as that. But it was Elizabeth and her guts—she went to  
290 the Decatur library [Maud Burrus branch] and signed on and got a library card. That was how  
291 the Decatur library system was desegregated. Elizabeth did it. [Audience applause] [Recording  
292 pauses while Ms. Daniel is escorted back to her seat, then resumes as Ms. Turner takes the  
293 podium.]

294 MS. TURNER: Thank you, Ms. Daniels [sic]. I've heard of getaway cars in banking  
295 [audience laughter], but this is the first time I've heard of getaway cars associated with the  
296 library, so we're glad you were there to help out. Our next speaker is Candler Broom, who is  
297 going to talk about the impact on the community that Elizabeth's actions and being here had.  
298 Candler?

299 [Audience applauds as Ms. Turner turns the podium over to Candler Broom.]

300 MR. BROOM: I've got my written speech up. I asked my wife, I said, "You know, I've  
301 written the speech, because Sue Ellen said I only had five minutes." I said, "So I wrote it," and I  
302 said, "but I can wing it. I can talk about Elizabeth all day long."

303           And she said, “How you going to do that? You can’t even remember my name most of  
304 the time. You better read it.” [*Audience laughter*]. So I think I will read most of it.

305           It’s a great honor to be here. I wouldn’t do this for anybody—at least here—except for  
306 Elizabeth Wilson. This community has always been blessed with good leaders, even though  
307 maybe in the recent history that’s slid a little bit. [*Looks around pointedly as audience laughs.*] I  
308 can talk about my brother-in-law like that [*laughs*]. People who had the foresight and the  
309 determination to make decisions and stick with them. I think back to those leaders who decided  
310 years ago that this wasn’t the best place for a train terminal and had to make a decision and  
311 sent it down the road to Marthasville [Atlanta] a little ways. I think that was a great decision. I  
312 would love to have been in on some of those meetings to hear the conversations that went on.  
313 People like Scott Candler, county commission chairman that created a state-of-the-art  
314 infrastructure that set DeKalb County years ahead of the rest of the state. [*Gestures toward*  
315 *Scotty Candler in the audience.*] His grandson is here today, Scotty. City leaders like Roy  
316 Blount, Sr., who fought and scrapped to bring MARTA to the city of Decatur. Some people may  
317 not agree with that now, but I think it a very important happening. City leaders like Eloise  
318 Leverett, Bill Breen, Jack Hamilton, Bob Carpenter, who stayed the course in the ’60s and ’70s  
319 as people and businesses were flying to the suburbs.

320           Decatur in the early ’60s was typical of most small towns in the South. We had the town  
321 square, we had the courthouse in the middle, we had the local hangouts—for most of us, across  
322 the street Tatum’s Pharmacy. Everybody went—all the guys went to Tatum’s Pharmacy. The  
323 girls would drive by to see who was there, and then they would duck as they got by Tatum’s so  
324 they wouldn’t be seen. Also most cities in the South at that time had the local school system. In  
325 fact, they had two local school systems. One school system was white; one school system was  
326 black. I think the catch-phrase used was “separate but equal.” Reasonable, intelligent people  
327 understood the inaccuracy of that statement. But to preserve the status quo, heads were firmly  
328 implanted in the sand. Time again for leadership to step forward in our community; and as it  
329 had in the past, it did.

330           A little lady who had migrated from Greensboro, Georgia, to Decatur in 1949 rose to the  
331 challenge. Her name, of course, Elizabeth Wilson. You’ve heard the term, “Walk softly but carry  
332 a big stick.” Who said that? [*Several people respond inaudibly from audience.*] I don’t know  
333 anyone who exemplifies that description more than Elizabeth. A devotee of Dr. Martin Luther  
334 King, Jr., who profoundly influenced her, Elizabeth took up the cause to integrate the Decatur  
335 city schools. The year was 1962. Elizabeth did walk softly, and she did use her big stick. She  
336 used it very politely, however. While rocks, sticks, and hate were hurled in cities all over this

337 country, it never happened in Decatur. In our city Elizabeth went about her job with quiet  
338 determination. That period covered a period of about two years.

339         There were many significant events during that time, too many to mention in my five  
340 minutes. One most significant event was her first meeting with then-school superintendent, Dr.  
341 Carl Renfroe. It lasted all day. Dr. Renfroe presented the reasons integration could not  
342 happen. A lot of that had to do—and I was surprised—with state law at the time. As we know,  
343 and as those of us who know Dr. Renfroe, I would have loved to be in the meeting. Because I  
344 can assure you that Dr. Renfroe did most of the talking, [*audience laughter*] and Elizabeth did  
345 most of the listening. But I can also assure you that, knowing Elizabeth, that when she left that  
346 room that afternoon, it had no effect on her or her cause whatsoever.

347         Over the next two years Elizabeth kept up a steady course. She was promised several  
348 concessions over the next few years, none of which were actually granted. She stepped on a  
349 lot of toes during that period, but she did it very softly. Two years after that initial meeting  
350 Elizabeth went to an open house in the new high school that had just been constructed. She  
351 went to an open house in a school that her children probably would not have the opportunity to  
352 attend. It was at this open house that Dr. Renfroe finally approached Elizabeth and basically  
353 said, “OK, Elizabeth, it’s time.” That was 1964; and in the fall of 1964 twenty-four African-  
354 American students enrolled in the Decatur city schools. I asked Elizabeth what finally happened  
355 to initiate the integration. Her response was, “The city leaders like Robin Harris, Davison  
356 Phillips, Carl Renfroe, and many, many others stepped forward to do what was right.” She did  
357 what most great leaders do. She gave the credit to somebody else. No rocks, no sticks, no  
358 blood—a peaceful, orderly integration of the Decatur city schools, led by the little lady who  
359 walked softly but carried a big stick.

360         One aside to show you what respect Elizabeth gained through that process happened a  
361 few years later. I was serving on the Decatur City Commission. And I got a call from Mr. Robin  
362 Harris. And when Mr. Harris called, I went to see him. Robin was one of those leaders I  
363 mentioned earlier, a rock of this community, and certainly one that we lost much too early. He  
364 said, “Candler, this commission needs black representation, and that black representation  
365 needs to be Elizabeth Wilson.” He said, “You and the city commission need to get behind  
366 Elizabeth and help her in her election bid.” This was not a token action; this was what was right.  
367 And this is what the leaders at that time in our city knew was the right thing to do. I served on  
368 the city commission with Elizabeth for six or seven years, and I can certainly tell you that Mr.  
369 Robin Harris was right on. Elizabeth was the right person.

370 Real leaders don't sit on their laurels. Elizabeth continues to be active and involved, and  
371 I know that she will as long as she's able. She certainly fits into that category of those leaders  
372 that I have discussed tonight. Elizabeth, we love you, and we thank you. *[Audience applauds*  
373 *as Mr. Broom leaves the podium and pauses to hug Ms. Wilson. Both return to their seats, and*  
374 *Sue Ellen Williams takes the podium. "Sue Ellen O. Williams reading comments from Michael*  
375 *Mears" appears superimposed over the screen.]*

376 MS. WILLIAMS: Mike [Mears, her former husband] actually asked me to make these  
377 remarks. And, Elizabeth, for you, I'm going to make them. *[Audience laughter] [Ms. Williams*  
378 *reads Mr. Mears's prepared speech]:*

379 I first met Elizabeth Wilson when she was organizing a healthcare clinic for the Decatur  
380 housing project. I was teaching at Decatur High School, and Dr. Carl Renfroe sent me to a  
381 public meeting where issues about the Decatur school system were being discussed. Elizabeth  
382 was one of the participants in that discussion. *[Camera moves its focus on Elizabeth Wilson in*  
383 *the audience.]* This was in the very early 1970s, and I was so impressed with her obvious  
384 dedication and concern not only for the city of Decatur but also for the people of Decatur. She  
385 was a calming influence during a rather troubling and turbulent time in Decatur. The Decatur  
386 school system had only recently gone through the process of integrating Decatur High School,  
387 and there was much concern in the community about where Decatur was heading at that time.  
388 Elizabeth was one of those individuals who maintained her dignity and poise through many  
389 public meetings.

390 Over the years since that first meeting Elizabeth and I got to know each other better; and  
391 I got to know one of her sons, Carter, and her daughters. Elizabeth as a single mother has  
392 done a remarkable job in instilling her values in her children. This is perhaps the greatest gift  
393 she could have given. I have always respected Elizabeth the mother even more than Elizabeth  
394 the community organizer, more than Elizabeth the commissioner, and Elizabeth the mayor.  
395 After I became mayor of Decatur, I received a call from Elizabeth, asking me to go to lunch with  
396 her. And I would add, as an aside, Mike also got that phone call from Robin Harris. We went to  
397 the Decatur Executive Club in the Decatur Federal Building. I remember that lunch so very well.  
398 We sat at the table next to the windows, looking out over Decatur's skyline. Elizabeth told me  
399 she was thinking of running for the Decatur City Commission, and what did I think about that. I  
400 was overjoyed that she would consider running for the Decatur City Commission, and I  
401 promised her my support. As we all know, Elizabeth won that election and many reelections  
402 afterward.

403           While I was mayor, and Elizabeth was serving as mayor pro tem, she and I went to  
404 Africa to visit with Decatur's sister cities in Burkina Faso. I was so glad to be a part of  
405 Elizabeth's first trip to Africa [*Camera moves back to wider shot of Ms. Williams at the podium*  
406 *and the first few tables, including Ms. Wilson's, in the audience.*] and so appreciative of the  
407 opportunity to see her touch the soil of her ancestors' continent. It was so evident that Elizabeth  
408 was returning to a place where her soul had once touched the land and the people. Watching  
409 Elizabeth visit with our friends in Burkina Faso was another of the many gifts she has given me  
410 over the years.

411           When I decided that I was no longer going to remain on the Decatur City Commission,  
412 Elizabeth and I discussed my exit from the role of mayor. I assumed that if I stayed on the  
413 commission until the end of my term, there would be some question as to who would be elected  
414 as mayor after the first of the year. I felt that Elizabeth deserved to be the mayor; and as the  
415 mayor pro tem, she would automatically be named mayor for the remainder of my term in office.  
416 So I resigned my position on the commission in November, and Elizabeth was named the first  
417 African-American mayor of the city of Decatur, Georgia.

418           Elizabeth Wilson exemplifies the very best that any community can offer to itself. She is  
419 the light which every community needs illuminating its pathways and the star which every  
420 community needs to have as its guide. She is also the friend everyone should have at least  
421 once in their lifetime. Congratulations to my friend, Elizabeth Wilson. Mike Mears. [*Audience*  
422 *applauds as Ms. Williams briefly leaves the podium to give Ms. Wilson a hug, then returns to*  
423 *address the audience.*]

424           Judy [Turner] got to throw me a curve, so I'm going to throw her one. Nibs [Gibson  
425 Stroupe] is here. Nibs is the pastor at Oakhurst Presbyterian Church, and I just told him I have  
426 got to give the invocation; but I'm going to let him come up and say a few remarks, because he  
427 was going to have an opportunity. As many of you know, Elizabeth Andrews's husband was  
428 killed; and the service for him was at Oakhurst Presbyterian this afternoon. So Nibs has been  
429 doing double duty, but I know he's got something wonderful to say. [*Audience applauds as Ms.*  
430 *Williams leaves the podium and Reverend Stroupe takes his place there.*]

431           REV. STROUPE: Thank you, Elizabeth [sic]. Sue Ellen asked me if I wanted to speak.  
432 And I said I was a preacher, so obviously I want to speak. [*Scattered audience laughter*] She  
433 told me to be very brief; so that's tough for a preacher, but I'll try. I know you've said a lot of  
434 wonderful things about Elizabeth. I want to add a couple. She and Ethel Stevenson were  
435 among five people who were on the Pulpit Nominating Committee who called me to be pastor of  
436 Oakhurst Presbyterian Church twenty-three years ago. Elizabeth and Ethel were the black folk

437 on the committee, and there were three white folk on the committee. Within two years all the  
438 white folk had left the church, and Elizabeth and Ethel are still there. So I give thanks for that,  
439 and thanks for your support.

440 I first got to know Elizabeth as a part of the board of the Community Health Center—of  
441 Oakhurst Community Health Center, which was one of her loves and I assume people have  
442 talked about tonight. And we give thanks for her leadership of that. And as I ended up chairing  
443 that board for a couple of years—and Elizabeth was a street warrior with the federal  
444 government. We often had to wrestle for funds from the federal government, trying to convince  
445 them that this [sic] was a lot cheaper to give healthcare this way and trying to convince them to  
446 expand that model, that if we used the model of the community health centers for everybody, it  
447 would still be a lot cheaper. We're still trying to figure that out in our society. I don't know where  
448 we're going to end up, but I can go on—I'll stop there.

449 But Elizabeth was a powerful enabler of those of us who would come together. She  
450 would get people who were from all walks of life, and we've heard that said. She could talk to  
451 powerful people; she could talk to people on the street. And so we give thanks for that ability. I  
452 often wondered how Elizabeth would—could do it, as she had to switch from being a street  
453 warrior to being a politician. Often, if you're a street warrior, it doesn't go well when you get into  
454 politics. But she demonstrated a remarkable capacity to shift her understanding and her  
455 approach to people and, as we've heard, the sense that she walked softly and carried a big  
456 stick. And she has had great influence on people and a great ability to say to everybody,  
457 whether you have a college degree or not, whether you have an education or not, "You're  
458 somebody. And you belong to the God that we claim as the center of our lives, no matter what  
459 you call that God." She had that ability to instill in people that you are important; you are  
460 somebody. And so we give thanks for that.

461 Elizabeth is one of the leaders that we've had. Now, we need that leadership again in  
462 Decatur. We've got black folk leaving Decatur as quickly as the white folk left Oakhurst when  
463 black folk came in. So we've got a lot of work to do. Elizabeth's still part of that work, and we  
464 give thanks for her leadership on that. She's been a great church member, a great leader in this  
465 community. But most of all she's had the ability, which we all need, and that is to say we need  
466 all of us to be part of the community—not just a certain kind of folk, not just the kind of folk we  
467 think will make good citizens, but all of us. If we're going to survive, we're going to have to be  
468 welcomed in the doors of many places. Elizabeth has done that better than anyone, and I thank  
469 her. [*Applause for Rev. Stroupe as he leaves the podium and hugs Ms. Wilson on his way back  
470 to his seat in the audience.*]

471           *[Ms. Williams takes the podium, with Bill Floyd and Judy Turner standing to the side.]*

472           MS. WILLIAMS: Elizabeth, you want to come up here? Not really, but you will. *[Ms.*  
473 *Wilson takes her place beside Ms. Williams.]* OK. Wow. *[To audience]* I know that you've  
474 sensed the words that you've heard over and over: gentle and kind and open and  
475 understanding, but a warrior at the same time. And all these characteristics are what make  
476 Elizabeth who she was during that time and who she is today. There are a lot of people whose  
477 actions like this alienate folks. And one of the reasons we thought this History-Maker Award  
478 was so appropriate for Elizabeth was the ability to make those changes and still have everybody  
479 like her. *[Scattered audience laughter]* That's pretty remarkable. OK, we have a few things we  
480 want to do. *[Retrieves a plaque from a box nearby.]* Everybody loves the "things." First of all,  
481 we're going to give you this little plaque to put on your wall. And it says, "The DeKalb History  
482 Center History-Maker Award presented to Elizabeth Wilson for courageous actions which  
483 brought equality, justice, and fairness to a community and its people and changed us for all  
484 time. March 12, 2006." *[Audience applauds as Ms. Williams presents the plaque to Ms.*  
485 *Wilson.] [Mr. Floyd joins Ms. Wilson and Ms. Williams at the podium.]*

486           MS. WILSON: That is nice!

487           MR. FLOYD: We're not through yet. *[Audience continues applause and rises in*  
488 *standing ovation. After audience is seated, Mr. Floyd continues.]* We do have another honor for  
489 Elizabeth. Most of you remember some years ago we dedicated a bronze on the Square to  
490 Elizabeth, which was a very eventful day, and I remember quite well. And one of the things  
491 Elizabeth said after we had made that bronze presentation in her honor—and we haven't thrown  
492 it away, Elizabeth. It's just being temporarily stored over there. *[Audience laughter. Ms. Wilson*  
493 *laughs and says, "All right.]"* One of the things she said that day, "You made an ordinary person  
494 feel very special." Well, I can tell you Elizabeth Wilson is anything but ordinary.

495           And I grew up in south Alabama in the '50s—segregated south Alabama. I can  
496 remember where the black people only came downtown on— *[Pauses as eyes well up with*  
497 *tears. To Ms. Wilson:]* I'm trying, Elizabeth. *[Ms. Wilson puts her arm around Mr. Floyd's*  
498 *waist.]* --downtown on Saturday afternoon. And I can remember in my college days driving  
499 over to Montgomery, Alabama, and watching the marchers from Selma in the street. We went  
500 up in the state office building and looked down on them. And I can tell you, Elizabeth has  
501 changed this world. She's changed this country. She's changed this state. She's changed this  
502 city. But more importantly to me, she changed me. *[Voice breaks as he chokes back tears.]*  
503 And I thank you for that, Elizabeth.

504           MS. WILSON: Thank you.

505           *[They hug each other as audience applauds.]*

506           MR. FLOYD: The first vote I cast as Decatur city commissioner was for Elizabeth as  
507 mayor pro tem. *[Ms. Wilson and audience laugh. Audience applauds.]* The first meaningful  
508 vote I ever cast was for Elizabeth as mayor. *[Ms. Wilson and audience laugh.]* And I would  
509 argue with [former Decatur mayor] Mike [Mears], because I don't remember their being any  
510 question about that at all as to who was going to take over when he left.

511           But we have one more honor that we tried to come up with, something that we thought  
512 might be appropriate for Elizabeth. And so, because—for Elizabeth tonight—because of the  
513 generosity of these people in this room, we're proud to announce the Mary Elizabeth Brown  
514 Wilson Scholarship, which will be administered by the Decatur Education Foundation, in the  
515 amount of \$10,000. *[Audience and a beaming Ms. Wilson applaud. Audience stands. Ms.*  
516 *Turner holds up a large poster-size check representing the scholarship.]* The amount will be  
517 awarded to a graduating senior from Decatur High School. And Sherry Breunig, would you  
518 mind coming up and accepting this on behalf of the Decatur Education— *[Voice trails off.]* And  
519 Gayle Gellerstedt—is Gayle here? Yeah, Gayle. *[Ms. Breunig and Ms. Gellerstedt go up to*  
520 *podium to accept award on behalf of the Decatur Education Foundation.]* It will be presented to  
521 a graduating senior from Decatur High School who has been accepted to an accredited college,  
522 university, or technical school to pursue an undergraduate degree and who demonstrates the  
523 following characteristics: a history of involvement in meaningful community service that  
524 enhances the lives of others, academic attainment that reflects a commitment to education and  
525 a potential for success in a chosen field of study as demonstrated by a GPA of 2.5 or higher,  
526 and resilience in overcoming adversity to achieve educational goals and career objectives.  
527 Congratulations, Elizabeth. *[Audience applauds as Ms. Gellerstedt and Ms. Breunig hold up*  
528 *facsimile of check.] [Ms. Turner takes the podium.]*

529           MS. TURNER: There are a couple of things Bill didn't tell you. First of all this was his  
530 idea to establish this scholarship for Elizabeth, and I think that's very fitting. The other thing is  
531 that the \$10,000 is only the beginning. We have already collected enough that we know we can  
532 do ten [thousand]. But once we get everything from tonight settled, we feel like there will be  
533 more. So we thank each of you who have contributed to this and each of you who are here  
534 tonight.

535           We have one other person who wants to make a special presentation to Elizabeth, and  
536 then we'll let her talk just a little bit *[Laughs]*. Eric Willis, would you please come up? To me the  
537 exciting thing about this is how many people have seen how much Elizabeth has done for other



538 people all through the years, and they're wanting to do something for her. And Eric is one who  
539 came forward and said, "Can I please do this?" So Eric? [*Mr. Willis takes the podium.*]

540 MR. WILLIS: *Superimposed over Mr. Willis's image onscreen is, "Eric Willis, Owner,*  
541 *Sonz Fitness Center"*] Good afternoon. I don't know Elizabeth as well as a lot of people that  
542 are here. When I met her, I just thought she was an average person. Now I'm kind of like  
543 blown away. [*Mr. Willis and audience laugh.*] You know—you know, when she came in [to  
544 Sonz], she was telling me that she was having some problems out of her knees. She wanted to  
545 get her knees strong. And I was like, "I can help you with that." It's the same thing I tell  
546 everybody, because I believe I can help anybody with anything. And we started to working.  
547 Probably one of the things that I appreciate the most was she allowed me to help her. A lot of  
548 people are a little timid because they don't trust the trainer. They think that the trainer's going to  
549 hurt them because of so many bad experiences and things of that nature. But she allowed me  
550 to help her. And whatever I asked her to do, I mean, she did. And some of the stuff, I didn't  
551 think she'd be able to do, but she blowed me away. Her strength and her confidence is just  
552 unparalleled with anybody I think I've ever trained, so I enjoy training her. And then we got to a  
553 point where, you know, she used up all her training sessions. And I wanted her to continue to  
554 work out, so I said, well, I have to do something so she can come back and work out. So  
555 tonight I want to present her with enough training sessions to last her for a long, long, long, long  
556 time. [*Audience laughter, followed by applause*] [*Ms. Wilson goes up to podium, hugs Mr.*  
557 *Willis, and accepts an envelope from him.*]

558 MS. WILSON, *laughing*: Oh, my gosh. This is great. Thank you. [*Audience applauds*  
559 *as Mr. Willis returns to his seat in audience, and Ms. Turner approaches Ms. Wilson to let her*  
560 *know that it's her turn to speak. Ms. Wilson is still laughing and is visibly moved by the*  
561 *preceding presentations.*] There are few times when I don't know what to say. [*Takes a deep*  
562 *breath and exhales audibly.*] And I know that this group over here at this table [in front, where  
563 she has been sitting] that's going to tell me in a minute that I should be brief. I do want to say  
564 thank you for coming. I am totally blown away with all of you. Thank you! [*Audience gives*  
565 *standing ovation.*]

566 I do want to take just a minute to recognize just a few people who are just—everybody in  
567 this room is special to me. Everybody. But there are a few people that I just want you to know  
568 that's here this evening. The young lady [Sally Daniel] who was part of the visit to Decatur  
569 library system way back in the early '60s—and she was quiet. I thought I was quiet, but I realize  
570 that she's much quieter than I was. And I do have to tell you this, that back in those days I think  
571 everybody probably had a plan. And they knew that if something happened that, you know,

572 there would be somebody there, you know, like a big group or somebody. I don't think I and  
573 Sally and the other person who was there that morning--was a lady named Emily [*Hesitates*  
574 *over last name.*] Brinkley?—we didn't really have much of a plan. And Sally is probably right: if  
575 we had probably came out of the door with handcuffs on, Sally probably would have left us in  
576 the [inaudible—sounds like “steps,” could be “stacks”?]. [*Audience and Ms. Wilson laugh.*] But  
577 the other person who was with me when we went in to check the first books out of the library  
578 was Ms. Dorothy Scott. So Dorothy, please stand up and let everybody see you. [*Ms. Scott*  
579 *stands to applause.*]

580 And, of course, I just need to share one little joke about when Ms. Sims and I went to the  
581 high school. Dr. Renfroe, you know, did—he talked a lot. [*Audience laughter*] I mean, he did  
582 talk a lot. And we listened; but when he kept insisting that he could not do what we wanted him  
583 to do, we kept—Sadie and I kept—insisting that we were not going anywhere. And we stayed  
584 there all day. And it was amazing, [*Ms. Wilson and audience laugh.*] because it was--again, we  
585 didn't have a plan. We just knew that it was time to do it. Right, Sadie? And so we did. And  
586 the results of that little effort that we also didn't have cameras and, you know, demonstrations  
587 and none of that, it was just us. And thank you, Sadie, and thank you, Dorothy Bell; because I  
588 did not do this by myself. It was with the help of you.

589 And then I'd like for you to meet my family. And I'll do this quickly, because they're  
590 going to tell me to sit down and shut up. But all the kids are here with the grandkids. So  
591 Richard, Carter, Leslie, Nicholas, Devon [spelling?], Kristin [spelling?], Annette, Keith, Valerie—  
592 could y'all just stand up? [*They stand to audience applause.*]

593 Ms.--the Sims [sic] are certainly—I wanted to be part of their family, but I could never  
594 figure out how to become part of them. I tried to play matchmaker, and that didn't work out, you  
595 know? [*Audience laughter*] And so Sadie is—I mean, she is just a wonderful person, and she's  
596 always in my life. And the same thing with Dorothy Bell. And I know that I'm the only adult in  
597 the whole world that still call her son “Bunny.” [*Audience laughter*] The kids grew up together,  
598 and we were a family. And we are family. And so thank you.

599 And then my friend who comes from Columbus, Georgia, every time there's something  
600 for me; she's always here for me. And we've been friends since she taught Richard  
601 kindergarten way back in those early years. So Ruth Weldon is here. [*Ms. Weldon stands to*  
602 *applause.*] And Sally and Lynn, thank you so much for coming, OK? And Sally Daniels [sic]  
603 has been a part of my life for League of Women Voters, Georgia Council on Human Relations,  
604 and all of the other things that made a difference in this community. And Lynn and I, we're

605 League [of Women Voters] members and have been for years. So thank you. This is very,  
606 very, very special for me today.

607 Now, I don't have anything else to say, other than I have—I think it's some high school  
608 students here. I would like for them to stand up. Where are the high school students? [*Several*  
609 *students stand throughout the room as audience applauds.*] Decatur High School. The reason I  
610 would like for them to stand up, a few weeks ago I was asked to come speak to that group of  
611 students, and I just said to them, right off the bat, “Do you know who I am?” Like I've got some  
612 kind of status or something, you know. [*Audience laughter*] And they didn't. But, you know,  
613 everybody knows Coach Wilson. So I didn't tell them at the time that I was Carter's mother. So  
614 as I presented to them about the library and the school and themselves focusing on something  
615 and never giving up, you know, decide what it is you want to do and do that. And then I said  
616 something to the effect that, “And if you have any questions, you might ask Coach Wilson.” And  
617 one of the guys in the class said, “See that man? I told you that was Coach Wilson's mother.”  
618 [*Audience laughter*] So I invited them to come this evening because, you know, we didn't make  
619 the news, and we have not been in the media—none of that. We just wanted to do what we  
620 knew was the best thing to do, not for our children but for all kids. And so as we use all of the  
621 facilities in DeKalb County and the library system, in the high school and the elementary school,  
622 it's for all of the kids. And that's what we wanted to see. And that's what we enjoy doing now.  
623 So thank you, high school students, for coming and being a part of this celebration this  
624 afternoon.

625 Thank you, committee—Sue Ellen, Judy, the rest of the committee. Thank you so much.  
626 You've done a wonderful job. And thanks to all of you for coming. You have made me very,  
627 very happy. [*Ms. Wilson leaves the podium to standing ovation. Ms. Turner takes the podium.*]

628 MS. TURNER: In closing tonight, again, I'd like to thank each of you for coming. And I  
629 would like to recognize the committee. You've seen three of us up here—Mayor [Bill] Floyd,  
630 Sue Ellen [Williams]—but also Juanchella Grooms has worked with us; Beth Johnson [spelling?  
631 Sounds like “Yonsson”?]—where is Beth? Beth's in the back of the room--she works with the  
632 History Center; and Peggy Merriss. And we thank all of y'all for being part of this today.

633 The books on the table were furnished today by the DeKalb Library System, but these  
634 are all books who have—which have a special meaning to Elizabeth. They're gardening,  
635 quilting, cooking, African-American history, and civil rights. So these books were chosen  
636 because of the things that have been so important to her through the years. Again, please don't  
637 take them, because Juanchella [*audience laughter cuts off the rest of her sentence*]. My

638 daughter says she doesn't check books out of the library because they always want them back,  
639 and the DeKalb Library does want their books back tonight; so please leave those on the table.

640 I'd also like to thank the History Center, Sue Ellen and her staff, for sponsoring this event  
641 tonight. The History Center is a very important part of Decatur and DeKalb County. This is the  
642 group that is responsible for making sure that we're aware of historic events in the community.  
643 So we ask that you support them as well as supporting this wonderful event tonight.

644 We've got one last treat for you. Of all the people here who have said, "I wouldn't do this  
645 for anybody but Elizabeth," Judge Mike Hancock is no exception. He is absolutely wonderful,  
646 and he means a lot to Elizabeth. And having Mike here tonight has been a real treat for all of  
647 us. So Mike we thank you, and he is going to close it with the Lord's Prayer. So would you  
648 please stand. *[Audience stands as Judge Hancock takes the podium.]*

649 JUDGE HANCOCK: It is interesting that today the International Sunday School Lesson  
650 was about the model prayer. And, if you would, please join me in bowing our heads as we go to  
651 the Throne of Grace in song. *[Judge Hancock sings "The Lord's Prayer.]" [Audience applause.]*

652 *[Recording ends with a photograph of Elizabeth Wilson.]*

653 END OF RECORDING

654

655

656

657

658

659

660

661