



1830 24th Street, N.W. 1832

### Living in Washington by Ann Wood

Career paths for women in the 50s were rocky. Coming to Washington in 1955, I worked for Rep. Marguerite Stitt Church (R. Ill), Wellesley '14, for *The Washington Post* as head copyboy, (previously a male job) as a reporter for *The Evening Star* and *The New York Daily News*, and in business as Ann Wood the Matchmaker.

A gypsy, I lived at ten addresses in Georgetown and Capitol Hill ...until going around the world in 450 days...returning to spend ten years at 1832 and 1830 24th Street, N.W., each with a garden outside my door for my green thumb.

Both had historic pasts, part of a row of ten grand, four story houses near embassies and the Kalorama residence of the French ambassador. Even with many changes inside, both appear outside as they have since they were built in 1927.

In 1984 both were owned by practical men, renting unneeded space. Tenant activity provided security before burglar alarms. All that changed in 2017. The richest man in the world, Jeff Bezos, bought the former Textile Museum for \$19 million and is remodeling the 29,000 sq. ft. for his own use.

That year Secret Service protection changed from patrol cars in the area to guards at targeted locations, beginning at 1832 24th Street, which Rex Tillerson, then secretary of state bought for \$5.5 million. Now Belmont Road is blocked off where the Obamas live. Guards are posted on two sides of the corner of Kalorama Road and Tracy Place where the Trump/Kushner family, ironically, moved into an exposed house just across from the Islamic Center of Washington.

In 1930 John Philip Sousa, the march king, lived at 1832 and in the early 1960s Marguerite Higgins, the first woman foreign correspondent to win a Pulitzer prize purchased it for \$20,000 and spent \$180,000 on renovation.

It developed colorful history under the ownership of Sidney Freidberg. He was a New York lawyer when President Johnson appointed him to a commission. House hunting during the 1968 riots, he crossed armed National Guard lines and bought it for \$70,000.

Sidney stayed on after his wife left him, taking her dining room table, politely leaving a similar antique, a farewell note, and dinner in the oven. A gregarious senior, he was a popular escort, buying two tickets on the aisle for concerts, operas and plays.

Lonely, he invited a friend to visit, who, after two years, suggested rent. A fine idea! He began accepting "paying guests", advertising in *The Washington Post*.

"EMBASSY ROW— Be a paying guest in my beautifully furnished townhouse on a quiet street in top neighborhood protected by Secret Service. Elevator, air-conditioning, Japanese garden with fountain and shaded chairs, ample parking, greenhouse, patio. Club-like atmosphere with three other guests."

It was all true, as I found out in 1984 after moving in.

His ad drew a variety of professionals four at a time, staying within the D.C. code, while creating the club-like atmosphere. He preferred medical applicants. After a heart attack he sent Sirisena, his Sri Lankan cook, to learn Pritikin diet preparation. A

notice at George Washington Hospital described two rooms, \$695 and \$625 a month, "includes utilities and linens, plus run of the house. One person per unit. One-year lease."

Guest rooms included: two on the fourth floor, one with a kitchenette; one on the third floor, in addition to Sidney's; and mine on the ground floor next to the garden. Every bedroom had an adjoining bathroom. His rules for guests outlined considerate habits.

"We all use the kitchen. Sirisena prepares a meal, (often for Sidney dining alone) cleans up, starts the dishwasher and mops the floor. Anna cleans other rooms on Tuesday and Friday mornings. Anything spilled or broken should be cleaned up immediately for sanitary and safety reasons."

Guests shared his ground floor library, and the drawing room, dining room, kitchen, greenhouse, and large terrace off the second floor. A calendar in the kitchen was for guests to reserve space for their own use.

On a visit to Washington, Kate Burke Wood, Wellesley '57, my sister-in-law, stopped by one morning. She expressed no surprise at being introduced to Sidney, a dignified elderly man in pajamas, robe and slippers. We were not aware of a link they had, that before his last year at Yale Law School Sidney had clerked in New York at her family's law firm, Burke & Burke.

When I answered his ad, guests included a salesman with a medical supply house, as well as a man with the National Endowment for the Arts, and an African-American attorney with the civil rights division of the Justice Department. A nurse who worked in the intensive care unit at Georgetown Hospital was leaving the garden room priced at \$425 a month.

Later guests included Anne Gurvin, cultural affairs officer for the U.S.I.A. in Europe and South America, and Dana Thomas, an American University student and part time *Washington Post* employee. She was often accompanied by her good friend Baron Gianfranco Fiori, Italian by title, but thoroughly American. Later, she married in Paris and authored two books on fashion.

After Dr. Jane Sprague received an anesthesiology fellowship at George Washington Hospital, she saw Sidney's newspaper ad and called him. He said,

"Pack your things and come here. You can go elsewhere if you don't like it."

She stayed a year. Her husband, Dr. David Sprague, remained in Chapel Hill, so her evenings were often spent reading in the library, fascinated by Sidney's record of his life in Washington, a volume for each year containing a well-written, typed, narrative, photos, and mementos.

Sidney's interests ranged from photography to riding, only abandoned after a bad fall. He was active in Democratic politics, interested in the Tuskegee Airmen and an admirer of beautiful Faye Wattleton, the first African American woman president of the Planned Parenthood Federation.

He dropped membership in the nearby, traditional Cosmos Club after his date had to enter by the side door. That was before women were admitted to membership. Today anyone wearing jeans may get exiled to sit in the garden.

He had a friendly rivalry with Budd Getschal, another senior, debating almost any subject, as they walked along the Georgetown canal towpath. However, his companions for evenings were women. He was a charmer.

Taking a summer course at Oxford University, he delegated me to distribute pay checks to Anna. He returned with trinkets for ten of his lady friends.

The arrival of a Southern belle brightened many of his days and some evenings out. She was young, pretty and ambitiously looking for a husband. Sidney benevolently watched her extravagance, except when she gave a dinner without tipping Sirisena for preparing the meal. However, the belle's marital campaign was successful, and Sidney went to North Carolina for her wedding.

In 1990 Sidney married for the fourth time, a project coordinator at the National Endowment for the Humanities, and wanted the room next to the garden for his bride's piano. I carried my belongings out the garden gate of 1832 and into the garden gate at 1830.

That house sold in 1928 for \$56,000, and in 1930s went for \$28,000. It was unoccupied when Washington lawyer Tyler Abell, and his wife, Bess, the White House social secretary bought it for \$81,000. in 1966, selling it later to John Ritch, III, a Senate Foreign Relations staffer.

Years earlier, during the 1966 inauguration festivities I dropped by a black tie party the Abells gave for Vice President Hubert Humphrey. I was wearing a short black skirt with a brocaded sweater, sensible attire for a fledgling reporter, driving a VW Beetle around town covering parties for *The Evening Star*. All the other women were in long gowns, *the* formal dress code for women of that era. Awkward!

In 1990 the Ritch's lived in the second and third floors of 1830 renting the fourth to a colleague, Jamie Rubin. Later he was state department spokesperson and married Christiane Amanpour. Rent for my garden room was \$775.

In 1994 John Ritch rented 1930 to the Costa Rican ambassador, and went to Vienna as a diplomat and then London as head of the World Nuclear Assn. He and his wife are back in 1830.

Sidney was fond of Dr. Margret Hoehe, a comforting presence for him during the five years she did genome research at N.I.H. Then she moved to Harvard Medical School to continue her work. When Sidney became seriously ill, his fourth wife vanished, and he moved with his daughter and son-in-law to Pelham, N.Y. Margret joined them there for Sidney's 80th birthday before returning to Berlin. She regrets declining Sidney's offer to sell her 1832 for \$500,000.

Leaving 24th Street in 1994, I moved to, and have remained in, an apartment with a garden in a building owned by Elizabeth Stack. Wellesley, '52.

####

Home