

# Family Matters

October 1, 2020 Official Newsletter of the Gillyard-Johnson-Mahoney Family and Family Reunions  
Volume 7, Issue 4



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## Surviving and Thriving

By: Bettie G. Griggs

Here we are, seven months after things changed for all of us. We are surviving and thriving. We have endured tremendous challenges and we have come out thriving.

As I write this article, over 7 million Americans have been affected by Covid-19, and over 203,500 Americans lives have been lost. They were husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children, grandparents, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, friends, neighbors, all lost. And yes, our family members and friends are among those affected and lost.

We have adapted to change. As the family's historian, I have documented stories of how we have not just survived but thrived. We've participated in Zoom Sunday School and Bible Study classes, worked as resilient essential workers, walked to raise awareness and money for causes we support, volunteered at

food distribution locations, organized virtual birthday celebrations and graduations, and checked in on our neighbors. We are thriving as we telework from home and are virtually schooling our children.

As we are thriving during this unprecedented time, Family Matters remains committed to bringing you news that matters to us as a family.

Voting is one of the most important rights we have as American citizens, and it should be accessible to all of us. I feel the November 3, 2020 election is one of the most consequential elections of our time.

We devoted much of this edition of Family Matters to voting. In our regular feature, the GJM Family History Voting Project, two cousins share their thoughts on absentee voting and voter suppression.

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## Family Spotlight

### Upcoming Events

**Dec 1, 2020**  
Next Family Matters Newsletter  
(submit any news or articles by Nov 1, 2020)

**July 30-August 1, 2021**  
The 9<sup>th</sup>  
Gillyard Johnson Mahoney Family Reunion

Check our website, Facebook page and your email frequently for all the latest information on our family and the 2021 Family Reunion



**Will Elliott Gillyard, Sr.**

Family Matters is shining the spotlight on Will Gillyard.

Will is the son of the late Charley Gillyard, aka Bohart, and the late Ora Mae Gillyard. He was reared in Lake Charles, LA and currently lives in Oakland, CA.

As a child Will played various sports. His favorite sport was baseball where he played first base for the American Legion Baseball League. After graduating from Washington High School in Lake Charles,

LA, he relocated to San Francisco, CA and attended San Francisco City College. Will majored in Psychiatric Nursing and finished in the top 2% of his class. In 1973, Will was licensed as a psychiatric nurse and worked in the field over 46 years before retiring in 2019.

On January 21, 1979, Will married Linda Pearl Richardson. Today they celebrate 41 years of marriage, have four beautiful adult children, Aaron, Will Elliott II, and twins Adrienne and Andre, and are currently enjoying seven grandchildren.

After connecting with his dad's family, on January 6, 2012, Will wrote on our family's web site, "Good to reconnect with my roots. I have met the Los Angeles connection and looking forward to meeting the rest... Love you all."

Like all Gillyard men, Will proudly proclaims to be the best Domino player in the world, and an excellent cook.

Family our country and democracy are stronger when we all vote. The Family History Team has joined the **When We all Vote** team to help make sure that we are registered and ready to vote. This election year, we are taking nothing for granted. We want to make sure that each of our voices is heard.

Over the past decade voter suppression has taken on many new forms and remains a real obstacle today-disproportionately impacting both voters of color and youth voters. When We All Vote is committed to the fight for fair and safe elections through supporting efforts to expand access to the ballot box including, vote by mail, early in-person voting and online voter registration.

So, family over the next several weeks, we have committed to contacting you. We want to make sure that you are registered to vote, and that you have made a plan to vote. We want you to know your rights as a voter:

- If you are in line when polls are supposed to close, stay in line - you have the right to vote.
- If you make a mistake on your ballot, ask for a new one.
- If the machines are down at your polling place, ask for a paper ballot.
- If your citizenship, criminal record, or other qualifications are questioned, immediately

call the Election Protection Hotline where trained volunteers are available to help.

- If you run into any problems or have questions before or on Election Day, call the Election Protection Hotline: **English: 1-866-OUR-VOTE / 1-866-687-8683**



## The GJM Family History Voting Project

GJM Family History Team leader, Bettie Gillyard Griggs conducted the following interviews with cousins, 70-year-old Velma Dumas and 68-year-old Joyce Wilson-Simpson.

**Family Matters: When you first voted, how old were you?**

**Joyce Wilson-Simpson:** I was 18 years old.

**Velma Dumas:** 29 years old.

**FM: Do you recall who or what issue(s) you first voted for. If so, who did you vote for, or what issue was it, and why?**

**JWS:** In 1970, voters of Shreveport, LA were presented a proposal which would revise the City's Charter, implementing a Mayor-Council form of government. I voted against the proposal and the proposal was defeated.

**VD:** I first voted October 1979 for governor of Louisiana. I voted for the Democrat, Louis Lambert. He and the Republican David Treen were placed in a Run-off, and Lambert lost.

**FM: Did you vote for President Obama in 2008 or 2012? If so, how did seeing the first black president elected make you feel?**

**JWS:** I voted for President Obama in 2008 and 2012. Seeing the first black president elected in the United States was like taking a breath of fresh air. It was truly an enlightening moment to see a change come. This showed the world the power of voting and keeping the faith.

**VD:** I voted for President Obama in 2008 and 2012. I knew he was the right candidate to run our country. I was so happy when he won the election. I knew Obama had made history and will go down in history as the first black President for our country. I can still remember talk of a black president, when I watched Good Times in the seventies.

**FM: Do you go to the polls to vote, or do you vote absentee and why?**

**JWS:** I vote by mail because the lines are too long and for health reasons.

**VD:** I voted absentee for the first time in the July 2020 primary election. I had always gone to the

polls to vote, but I received a form in the mail from the voter's office offering me the option of voting absentee in all elections. I decided that this would be best for me. I cannot stand up for long periods of time anymore.

**FM: Do you believe voting by mail or absentee voting leads to voter fraud? Why or Why not?**

**JWS:** No, I do not believe that voting by mail leads to voter fraud. If the clerk's office is secure and the system is functioning as it should, there should not be any fraud.

**VD:** I do not think that voting by mail or absentee voting leads to fraud. It is believed by some that a person could vote more than once. I do not see this happening. A person is only mailed one ballot. On the day of an election, a notation of "voted by mail" is placed by the person's name who has already

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In this month's column for Healthy Living, I am providing information about Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Most of the information was taken from resources and articles I summarized from research using the internet.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month is marked in countries across the world every October and is a yearly health campaign organized by major breast cancer charities every October. It helps to increase attention and support for the awareness, early detection, and treatment as well as palliative care of this disease.

#### Importance of Awareness

Breast Cancer Awareness is an effort to raise awareness and reduce the stigma of breast cancer through education on symptoms and treatment. Awareness surrounding breast cancer is said to be incredibly important, because early detection often through screening can catch the disease when it is most treatable. According to the American Cancer

Society (ACS) breast cancer is the most common cancer in American women, except for skin cancer.

#### Things Being Done

Public health agencies are working to make sure all women are screened for breast cancer when recommended, and those who are diagnosed with breast cancer get the best treatments. They are also, helping women to reduce the risk factors that raise their chances of getting breast cancer. Together these efforts could reduce racial disparities in breast cancer.

#### Support for Breast Cancer Awareness Month

On the first day of October, you will likely see many shades of pink in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Pink is worn, because it represents fear of breast cancer, hope for the future and the charitable goodness of people and businesses who publicly support the breast cancer movement. Pink is also intended to evoke solidarity with women who currently have breast

cancer. We can, also show support for Breast Cancer Awareness Month by:

- Participating in the Susan G. Komen race for the cure
- Spreading awareness by showing support on Facebook or Twitter
- Donating
- Volunteering

#### Remember Schedule an Annual Mammogram



### GJM Family History Voting Project (continued from page 2)

**VD:** voted by mail. This keeps the person from voting in person.

**FM:** In what state do you live? Do you believe there is or maybe voter suppression happening now in your state leading up to the November 3, 2020 election?

**JWS:** I Live in California. I think as large as California is that if information is in the hands of voters and the postal system is reliable, we can make it.

**VD:** I live in Louisiana. I think there is voter suppression happening in Louisiana leading to the election. It is with the United States Postal Service. The mail is being delayed. I think this is being done on purpose. The United Postal Service is now warning states, including Louisiana that

voters risk their ballot not getting back to election offices in time because of delays in mail delivery.

**FM:** What advice would you give specifically to younger family members about the importance of voting?

**JSW:** Voting is truly a way to express how you would like changes in society for the betterment of all. Sitting down holding your hand and talking will not curve problems. Vote and then be heard. It is more effective. Be a solution in these changing times. Your vote will be that sparkle of light that will brighten your life and leave a path for your family.

**VD:** Every vote counts. Make your voice heard by voting. If you do not vote, you are giving up your voice. By voting, you help impact issues that matter

the most to you.

**FM:** Thank you so much for agreeing to participate and sharing your voting experience with the family.

\* Some editing was done to clarify, but not to change answers.



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**Family Reunions  
Mission:**

*To focus on the things that shape us rather than the circumstances that divide us; to strengthen and preserve family as God orders our steps. We value God's Plan, Family, Tradition, and Service.*

**We are on the Web!**  
gilyard-johnson-mahoney.com

Email Us:  
gjmfamilyreunion@gmail.com

**MAKE A PLAN**

**REGISTER**  
VoteSaveAmerica.com

1. Vote in person (before Nov 3<sup>rd</sup> or on election day)
2. Vote by mail (check the rules in your state). In most states you will need to request a ballot. When received, open, read, make your choices, sign it, seal & drop off in mailbox or ballot drop box

**YOUR VOTE MATTERS**

Our democracy is a precious thing and it is up to all of us to protect it.

**Surviving and Thriving**

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The family history team has also volunteered with "When We all Vote" (page 2) and will text family members, and people across the country reminding us all to register, make a plan and vote. We do not want to take anything or anyone for granted. We need everyone to vote.

As we continue to survive and thrive, we are mindful that this is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. On page 3, we share important information on this deadly disease.

There is no Family Matters without

Family Spotlight (page 1). We shine the light on Will Elliott Gilyard, Sr.

Seeing us thrive in these challenging times remains me of the words of Maya Angelou "My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style." And so, it is. We are not just surviving, we are thriving.

Enjoy Your Blessings!

*Bettie*

