

WXP
Post
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Frank Wills—And Attorney

It seemed altogether fitting to the 200-300 people who went to the Lincoln Temple United Church of Christ last week that Frank Wills should have been honored with a testimonial. But it did strike some of them as a bit strange that he should have been accompanied by a lawyer.

Frank Wills is the guard who discovered the Watergate burglary, and he has never been charged with anything except, perhaps, saving America. So what was he doing with a lawyer in tow?

It turns out the lawyer, Dorsey Evans, is Frank Wills' agent, and he had ample reason for being there. Out of approximately \$800 raised that night on Wills' behalf — including a little over \$100 from the sale of a color brochure with pictures of Frank and the Watergate complex — Wills got "about \$500." The rest went to the agent.

No accusation of anything crooked here. It's all part of a contract Wills

and Evans signed last May giving the attorney-agent 25 per cent of whatever Wills makes from personal appearance, interviews, honorariums and so forth.

The Rev. Benjamin Lewis, pastor of Lincoln Temple, said he came up with the idea of last week's testimonial after he read a column of mine telling how the Watergate hero had gone jobless for much of the time following his June 12, 1972, discovery. (He is working now.)

Members of several other congregations joined in the testimonial. But even though the tribute to Wills was a spontaneous response, Dorsey Evans still got his 25 per cent of the night's contributions.

The proceeds of the sale of the booklet are a different matter. Evans says he paid out of his own pocket for the printing of the booklets — \$5,000 for a run of 5,000. Sales, at an average of a dollar a-piece, go to reimburse Evans,

at least until the debt is paid off. When Washington Star-News columnist Mary McGrory paid \$20 for one of the brochures, she thought she was making a \$19 contribution to Wills. Instead, it turns out, the whole \$20 went to pay off the \$5,000 printing bill.

Evans says there is still a balance due him of about \$3,500. But he won't talk much about the arrangement between him and Wills.

"We have a written agreement," he said, "but I have an agreement that Frank and I are able to coexist with."

The agreement is a one-year contract that expires next May giving Evans claim to 25 per cent of the "gross return from the information, interviews, likenesses taken of him and/or received." It doesn't matter whether Evans, Wills or some third party sets up the appearances, interviews or whatever. Evans still gets his 25 per cent.

According to Wills, the 25 per cent cut also comes out of any contributions made directly to him as, for instance, in response to newspaper articles. Evans has asked this reporter and others to have donors send contributions to his office. Wills says that the donations, in general, are deposited by Evans who then writes Wills a check.

Evans would not say whether he takes an agent's fee from direct contributions.

He insists that he earns whatever he gets from Wills' activities. "The bulk of the work I do for Frank I don't get paid for," he said. "I did 18 or 20 hours of office work handling approximately 55 local job offers and 20 offers from out of the city as a result of the article you wrote. I received no compensation for that. That's just one thing.

"I get letters all the time about Frank. Somebody has to answer those. I just dictated four letters yesterday (Monday). There's no way to get compensation for my stamps, my secretary, stationery. I've given maybe 50-60 hours for Frank. Many of his public appearances, I go with him.

"I'm giving more to Frank than all of the funds put together—my time, my advice; I had to put on extra people to help answer the mail."

Wills says he doesn't object to Evans' being compensated for his efforts as an agent. "But a lot of things, like the church testimonial, are nothing of his own doing. He never went out on his own looking for anything. He just responded to them when they came in. Like if somebody saw something in the paper and gave me a check for \$5, I would get \$3.75 and he would get \$1.25."

As for the brochures, "He did that on his own. He just took a chance on that."

Despite his misgivings, Wills was reluctant to talk for publication about his arrangement with Evans. "I don't want people to get a negative impression of Frank Wills. People have been sending these things in sincerely, and someone who wants to help me education-wise or financial-wise, it might turn them off."

Well, I doubt it. Frank Wills will be no less a national hero whether he gets 75 per cent, 100 per cent or 0 per cent of whatever contributions are made on his behalf.

But people who make the contributions ought to know.