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*Democracy
in Action
—a story*



MARION MONTGOMERY

Vote For Whom You Please

It really does make a difference in the way you feel—voting I mean. I'll be seventy-three next August and I never had voted till this year and I don't suppose I ever would have except for Wanda Flemming. Out here at Sunrise we have supper and then we talk awhile on the front porch before we go to bed, and one night Wanda said she thought it was a shame the way we girls didn't take an active interest in what was going on around us the way we used to. Her husband was state representative back in the twenties, and she traveled with him some and even spoke two or three times for him, I think. Anyway, she was saying that we were like most of the rest of the citizens, just not interested enough in our government, and we ought to do something about it.

The next morning at breakfast she made the announcement that she was going to meet with any interested ladies in the study to discuss what we could do about the election that was coming up. Ada Trembleton kept pretending she didn't understand where we were going to meet, and before Wanda remembered herself she was shouting STUDY. Then we all laughed, except Wanda, because it's hard to remember that Ada can hear a pen drop without the horn she sticks up to her ear all the time. When you see that horn and her face straining like she's trying to hear, you just can't help shouting. I've seen visitors shout themselves white in the face sometimes, and if Ada didn't have that horn stuffed with cotton she really would be deaf by now. Anyway, Wanda shouted two or three times before she remembered about Ada.

Marion Montgomery has stories in recent issues of Georgia Review, University of Kansas City Review, Western Humanities Review, Western Review, and Views. His poems have appeared in various periodicals, and at present he is working on a novel. He lives in Athens, Georgia, where he teaches English at the University of Georgia.

There must have been twelve or thirteen people who stopped in the study that morning. Wanda talked mostly about how we were admitting our age when we stopped taking an interest in the world around us and how one of the things we certainly ought to be interested in and set an example about was voting. Then she told some stories about the year her husband got elected and how they spent so much time and money trying to stir up the voters to do their duty, and what a lesson it had been to her and how she had voted every year, until last, and how she intended to vote from now right on.

When she got through, she asked how many of us were registered. There wasn't a single person there who was. Then she asked how many of us had ever voted, and it seems to me that only Ada raised her hand. At any rate there weren't over two or three who had. So Wanda was discouraged at that a little. She said she knew a young man from the Jaycees or Rotary or whichever one of these clubs it is that takes so much interest in elections—you know, the one that paints signs on sidewalks during elections—*VOTE FOR WHOM YOU PLEASE, BUT VOTE*. Wanda said she knew this young man, and that she thought it would be a good idea to have him out one evening to talk to us about voting.

He came. It was on a Wednesday evening, I believe. Or Thursday. I don't remember just which one. But he came out to talk to us. Wanda had put up a little notice on the bulletin board and made announcements at supper, and we really had a pretty good crowd there. I was proud of us the way we showed such interest in the whole thing. I don't think anything has done me quite as much good, except going to Church of course, in the three years I've been out here at Sunrise. There must have been twenty of us in the study that night.

And the young man was so nice. He knew what he was talking about, too, and of course he would since Wanda had asked him. We had an informal period before the talk just so we could get acquainted beforehand, and he was as pleasant and friendly as anyone you'd ever hope to meet. We were a little embarrassed because of Ada, though. Once or twice she had him shouting so that he fairly made the walls ring. I suppose it would have been the thing to do to warn him, but we were sort of embarrassed for her, and anyway it was time for his talk, so we didn't say anything at all.

His speech was short and straight to the point, and I think it really did a lot of good. What he said was pretty much what Wanda had been saying, but he was a little sadder and madder about the whole problem I think. He told about some politician who had been caught

just that week in a scandal, though he wouldn't say who it was when Ada asked him, and he said he supposed that for the most part we deserved whatever crooked politicians we got if we didn't take enough interest to really get out and vote when the chips were down. And he's right too, because really if all of us voted, there wouldn't be the scandals and bad government we have so much of now. He told us what his club does to wake up the public. It really is amazing how many signs they paint and how many ads in the papers, and the amount of money they spend is just unbelievable.

When he finished we had a question and answer period that went pretty well till Ada got to asking a question and couldn't hear the answer. The young man got to shouting again. Ada had sat down close to the end where the speaker's table is—so she could hear, she said. And then she tried to get him to say who we ought to vote for. He wouldn't say though, because he said that was something we would have to decide for ourselves. He really was a nice young man and he did a good bit about stirring Sunrise up too.

Next morning John, our gardner and driver, had to make two trips in the station wagon to carry us all down to the courthouse to register—that was the first step of course. Wanda was already registered, but she went both trips to help the rest of us since she knew so much about those things. Ada went the trip I did, and naturally she couldn't resist using the ear horn out in public that way. She had people shouting from one end of that courthouse to the other. I'll declare, I felt like pretending she wasn't even with us. But she's so good natured, even if she is a little strange.

Well, we all got registered that day, and it was only about two weeks before the election. Wanda wrote the two men who were running for office, Sam and William, and invited them to speak to us the way the young man had spoken. But neither one could get free. We got the nicest letters from both of them about how much they were counting on us and how sorry they were their schedules wouldn't allow them to spend an evening with us and how much they would appreciate our votes and all. Wanda read the letters to us. They were both running for the state legislature, it turned out, just like Wanda's husband had, and she was very anxious to get them out to Sunrise. She was very disappointed of course, but she decided the thing to do, since they couldn't come, was to tell us something about them herself.

Well, she got some information from their campaign directors and some from the newspapers and talked to us about them. They both

sounded like such good men that it really was a problem. I think that's what made so many of us lose interest. Wanda finally had to say she herself couldn't endorse either one of them, even though she knew which one she was going to vote for. She had to be fair, she said, and they were both good men—though I remember that at one time she was arguing a little on Sam's side till Ada got into the argument. And then William seemed to have certain qualities, too, and so we ended up the night before the election not knowing which one we would vote for.

The next morning when John drove us down to the courthouse, there weren't but five of us who were going. Wanda was very disappointed because she had worked so hard. I believe it really hurt her the way the rest of the girls just petered out after registering and everything. Ada came, and I was there, and Becky Thompson and Tilly Watson. We talked about Sam and William—I still can't remember their last names for the life of me—we talked about them all the way down, and by the time we got there we hadn't decided which one we were going to vote for at all. Wanda said we ought not talk about it anymore, but just vote for the one we wanted to win. But the way Ada put it—and she was right for once—we really didn't know enough about either one and we were likely to be voting for the wrong man and that wouldn't be fair because both of them had asked us for our votes. We didn't want to be unfair of course. It really would be bad if we bunched up and voted for Sam when William was the best man, or the other way around. I thought Tilly was going to cry. There we were all fussing and arguing and not knowing which one we ought to vote for.

Finally Ada said the sensible thing. "There're five of us," she said. "Let two of us vote for Sam and two for William and let Wanda vote for the best man. That way we will really cast only one vote. We'll cancel each other's vote out and Wanda will vote for us."

Well, it sounded like a good idea to me, because Wanda was a sort of professional. Then we started talking about which two would vote for Sam and which for William. Tilly and I were going to vote for William. I liked William, really. I always have liked William because I have a boy named William and my husband was named William, and you know how you get attached to those names. Well, that left Ada and Becky to vote for Sam and we thought everything was straight. But Ada decided that she really wanted to vote for William. So she swapped places with Tilly. She'd changed her mind again though before we got our ballots, and I thought Tilly was going to give up and

break into tears right there. Really, Ada can be exasperating sometimes, sometimes even downright cruel.

I'll say this for Wanda, when everything looked so confused and it looked like we would end up just not voting at all, she stepped in with a solution. She said that she wouldn't vote after all. You see, what was bothering Tilly was the fact that if Ada changed sides at the last minute, that would leave only one of us voting for Sam or William, and that would upset everything. Anyway, Wanda said she wouldn't vote herself, but would help each of us vote so we'd be sure to cancel out. That made Tilly feel better, and it seemed to suit Ada too, because she didn't change sides anymore.

It was quite an experience, and I wish I had been voting all these years. It's not easy of course, keeping up with everything and trying to decide which man you ought to vote for. It really tires you out. But it gives you such a good feeling when it's all over and you know you've at least done your share to try to elect good officials. I never will forget scratching Sam's name and folding the ballot and stuffing it in the box. It really was a good feeling. Even Tilly had it I could tell.

And Ada—Ada was just beside herself all the way back out to Sunrise. She tried to pick an argument with Wanda, but Wanda wouldn't argue. So Ada got up a contest to see who could count the most signs saying *Vote for Sam* and who could get the most *Vote for William* signs. She and Tilly were doing fine till I noticed that Ada was counting the *Vote for Whom You Please* signs on her side of the car. Tilly just shook her head then and wouldn't play anymore. Wanda was quiet all the way back home, and I know what was wrong too. She was thinking about all those people out at Sunrise who hadn't voted, some of them even after they'd registered. Our consciences were clear though. And you don't know what sort of thrill it was for me next morning when we opened the paper and I saw that William had won.

