

# Hospital Birth (1919)

*John Q. Barrett\**

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In 1911, Robert H. Jackson, a law student, met Irene A. Gerhardt, a state government secretary, in Albany, New York. They dated during that academic year while Robert, a senior at Albany Law School, completed its program.

In summer 1912, Robert returned to Jamestown in western New York State, the city where he had already begun to establish himself. After he became a lawyer in 1913, he built his law practice there. He saved money to buy a house and courted Irene by letter and occasional visits.

In 1916, Robert and Irene married in Albany and then made Jamestown their home. Within months, however, he was recruited to practice law with a prominent law firm in Buffalo. So the Jacksons moved to a Buffalo apartment and lived there for the next two years.

It seems that while Robert practiced law in Jamestown and then in Buffalo, Irene assisted him a bit but was not employed outside the home. Although she was a quiet person and new to western New York, she made friends and got involved in community activities.

In Fall 1918, Robert Jackson was recruited back to Jamestown to serve as corporation counsel (the city's attorney). At about that same time, Irene became pregnant.

On July 19, 1919, the Jacksons became parents. Their son William Eldred Jackson, named for Robert's late father, was born that Saturday in Jamestown's Woman's Christian Association (WCA) Hospital.

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More than three decades later, Robert—by then Justice Jackson—recorded these thoughts, which are focused quite a bit on finances, about the July 1919 passage in his life:

When Bill was born I had a sense of getting a great deal more credit for it than I had earned and a certain sense of the vastness of new obligations. I took out additional insurance. I felt an interest in the public schools and the future of the community that I hadn't quite so keenly felt before. Generally I behaved as one, I suppose, who had given hostages to fortune.<sup>[1]</sup> I also felt that my wife was more helpless. Up to that time I had felt that if anything happened to me, she could take care of herself quite readily, but encumbered by a child I felt that she was entitled to added protection, which I tried to provide by way of insurance. I don't know that I analyzed my feelings too deeply because I was pretty busy practicing law and taking care of my responsibilities.

Having a family, I suppose, was a new kind of burden for me, but I can't say that I ever was really burdened. I didn't have much money, but never in my professional life was there a time when I had any problem about meeting my office rent or any obligations. I was careful about not incurring them if I couldn't meet them. Somehow or other I always managed to be ahead of my obligations. That was one of the things that my father taught me and made very emphatic. My credit rating was always first-class in the local stores and banks. I never had any difficulty with financial matters.

My son was not born at home. That was a departure from anything that ever happened in my family. My two sisters and a brother who didn't live [and I] had all been born at home. That was the accepted thing as far as I knew. But

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson borrowed this phrase from Sir Francis Bacon, who used it, more negatively with regard to the impact that a wife and children have on a man's great enterprises, in his 1625 essay, "Of Marriage and Single Life." See [www.bartleby.com/3/1/8.html](http://www.bartleby.com/3/1/8.html) (visited July 20, 2018).

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the doctor said my wife should go to the hospital, so hospital it was.<sup>2</sup>

Bill Jackson, whom I had the great fortune to know, became a gifted writer and lawyer. He was, as a U.S. Navy officer, his father's executive assistant in the prosecution of Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg during 1945-1946. He spent his career practicing law at a leading international law firm, Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy. And he was, proudly, a father.



Spring or Summer 1921: Robert H. Jackson holding his son William.

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<sup>2</sup> COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE, *THE REMINISCENCES OF ROBERT H. JACKSON* 245-46 (Harlan B. Phillips, ed., 1955).