

Harry James Wilford

story · July 24, 2026

On this day in 1910, my grandfather, Harry Wilford was born. A Union man, a Teamster, Democrat. He was loved and hated fiercely.

He did not suffer fools, and you crossed him at your own peril. He was shot at and received numerous death threats while working as Secretary of Treasury at Teamsters Local 238.

He was known for his hard-line negotiation, and not known to mince words. He was a truck driver for years before that. Served in WWII in France - where he drove transport trucks full of troops and jeeps with colonels around. There are enough war stories to fill a book.

When I came along as a little kid, I was often able to observe him while he was at work, as on Saturdays I would join him at the Teamsters Hall. I could tell he was either revered or feared (or both) by the way the others at the Hall treated me. He always gave me the master key to the building. I wandered through every office, opened every single door and drawer that I wanted to. I even opened up the jukebox they had for the Hall when they rented the place out for dances. I wanted to see how it worked, and while I was at that, I filled my pockets full of quarters.

There was a room in the basement with a table where he taught me to shoot pool. There were ashtrays and the smell of smoke everywhere. If I wanted, he'd turn on the PA in the Hall and let me sing / yell into a microphone; my reverberated voice booming off the walls of the cavernous room. Mostly I just sat at his desk piqued my curiosity for hours at what I'd find. There was a .357 magnum in the bottom drawer that I didn't mess with. But under that were a few stag magazines that kept me entertained for hours. There were lots of newspapers and photographs, bottles of liquor, decks of cards from every corner of the globe, boxes filled with Las Vegas dice and casino chips, rare coins and more cards, bowls of mints and nuts and chocolates, toy trucks, and other curiosities people gave him as gifts.

He was a great man, though not without great faults. Some would say he lived a turbulent life. A life full of many houses - with a skeleton in a closet of every home. I would just say he lived a full life. But I only saw him with eyes of innocence, because I knew nothing but that he loved me and that I was his favorite. He never had to tell me that - he made sure I knew it.

These are some photos from his Teamster days. He was close with Jimmy Hoffa.