

THE BELL FAMILY—A story by Bob Hill

Bob and Nancy Bell's love affair with their Floyds Fork farm was the equal of their marriage. Both long-term romances were anchored in a sense of time, place, family and shared respect.

The equation was simple: The Bells gave to their land – they added to it, nourished it and enjoyed it – and the land gave back. Their histories became one and the same. The Bell's legacy is that even in death what they built, lived on and shared together will now endure forever as part of the 21st Century Parks gift to Louisville.

Both Bells grew up in or near Monticello, KY., a small Wayne County town just above the Tennessee border. Nancy was born September 16, 1923; one of four children of a country doctor who would sometimes take his family along on house calls in an old Model T Ford.

Bob Bell was born on September 4, 1929, one of six children of a Monticello lawyer and banker whose Depression-era wages often included his clients' chickens, cows and hogs. He died of congestive heart failure when Bob Bell was four years old.

Although Nancy was six years older, the two knew one another growing up. They had to in Monticello – population 1,500.

Nancy graduated from its high school in 1941 and attended Centre College in Danville, earning a degree in biology. Women from rural Kentucky attending college were then something of a rarity, but her father the doctor had always encouraged it. After college she taught at the high school for a year and worked as a hotel clerk.

"I once thought I would be a doctor," she would say, "but I decided along the way that looked like a long process. So I decided not to do that."

Bob Bell graduated from Monticello High School in 1947. He was an admittedly indifferent student with an adventuresome, streak. As a young man he worked on farms, harbored vague thoughts of becoming an attorney and had some familiarity with the local moonshine.

The drive and gregarious ways that would eventually guide him into a successful career selling building supplies hadn't fully kicked in.

"Mostly," he said, "I just wanted to finish high school."

Bob and Nancy Bell began dating in the late 1940s. A few of dates included cruising Monticello's few streets in an open, home-made contraption he called his "Skeeter" car – basically a 1930s Plymouth with its body yanked off the frame. The couple survived, if not thrived on, the experience and were married in 1950 – eloping to nearby McCreary County to do so.

The Bells moved to Louisville in 1950 where Bob got a factory job at the old American Radiator & Sanitary Corporation. He left there to drive a home delivery truck for Donaldson Bakery, carrying bread into houses at 17 cents a loaf.



As that business faded away, he found himself in 1963 selling lumber supplies for the Home Supply Company. He stayed there 33 years.

"I was lucky," he explained. "I had a lot of good customers."

"Well, he worked hard, too," said his wife. "He was a good salesman."

Along the way the Bells raised two daughters, Nancy, born in 1951, and Mary, born in 1952. The girls became involved with saddlebred horses, traveling with their parents to many shows. To accommodate their hobby, Bob Bell in 1971 bought an 11-acre piece of Floyds Fork bottom land at the



end of Gilliland Road near Eastwood.

With the addition of a small frame house the farm became home. As adjacent land became available, the Bells built their “End of the Lane” farm to 120 acres.

They loved its solitude. Nancy Bell grew tomatoes, corns and beans in their garden. Bob Bell raised his saddlebreds. Neighbors became best friends. Their daughters, nieces and nephews went fishing in the farm pond, rode the land in an old horse-drawn doctor’s buggy, a family heirloom.

Bob and Nancy Bell celebrated their 58th wedding anniversary living on their farm. By then the work had become too much, but they didn’t want to leave their land, all they had built together. So they decided to sell their farm to 21st Century Parks, knowing it would then be protected forever.

The sale came with the understanding the Bells could live on their land as long as they wished. That dream tragically ended when both were killed in a Shelbyville Road accident last December.

The many mourners at their funeral expressed one thought: Bob and Nancy Bell were once again – and forever – together.

-Bob Hill

**The Bell Barns still sit along the Humana Grand Allee in Beckley Creek Park.*