

KATIE BELL, SID AND CHILDREN

Essay

ON A SPRING DAY IN 1919, five-year-old Bill Dewberry, his mother, younger brother and baby sister climbed aboard a train in Ohio and settled into their seats. As the train began to move, the young boy might well have peered out the window to enjoy one last look at the area that had been his home for the past year. Or, just as likely, he was too excited about where he was going to think about what he was leaving behind.

His mother, on the other hand, probably gazed around a bit wistfully, keenly aware that by day's end she would be starting a new and unfamiliar life in another state. The 23-year-old woman had good reason to harbor mixed feelings about what awaited them. On one hand, moving to Virginia was a kind of homecoming—she had been born and raised in Clarksville. On the other, Katie Bell Wilkinson Dewberry had always lived in towns, not in the country . . . and never in an abandoned and rundown shanty on a rocky, overgrown farm like the one she would soon be calling 'home.'

If Katie Bell was lucky, her three young offspring—Bill, Claude and Phyllis—were lulled to sleep by the rhythm of the train swaying and clacking on its journey south. She then could enjoy the rare luxury of quiet time to contemplate what had brought her to this juncture in her life.

The short answer was love.

Almost a decade earlier, 14-year-old Katie Bell had met

and fallen for Albert Sidney Johnston Dewberry, a boarder at the Gordons, next door neighbors of the Wilkinsons in Clarksville. A bridge builder by trade, Sid was in town working on a span over the Roanoke River. Two years later, in late December 1912, the couple married at Boydton, the county seat of Mecklenberg County.

Now, more than six years into her marriage, Katie Bell could recall with amusement another momentous train ride. Her mother, Lillie Wilkinson, had insisted on sending Katie's older brother Woody along on the train to chaperone the couple from Clarksville to their wedding in Boydton, and accompany them on the first night of their honeymoon. The no-nonsense Mrs. Wilkinson apparently wanted assurance that the fellow who had swept her 16-year-old daughter off her feet would follow through on his honorable intentions.

For his part, Sid Dewberry did precisely what was expected of him . . . at least as far as the wedding goes. The couple duly exchanged vows and signed the necessary papers, sealing their marriage. Sid had his own ideas, however, about where and how his new brother-in-law fit into the honeymoon picture. Instead of purchasing a ticket for Woody to join him and his bride for their wedding night in Danville at Sid's brother Ed's home, he bought him a return ticket only as far as Clarksville. The pair waved goodbye to their would-

be escort as he climbed down from the train; they continued on alone to visit Dewberry kin on their own.

After spending the night with Ed Dewberry, the newly-weds hopped aboard a train to Hurt to visit Sid's oldest sister Julia Wilson and her husband Charlie. There Katie got her first glimpse of the ramshackle shanty and farm that had once served as the residence of Sid, his parents (Molly and Jack Dewberry) and eight siblings. By 1912, the house had passed through the hands of various renters and then been abandoned. Now, a full six years and three children after the honeymoon visit, Katie could be forgiven for wondering if her husband was in his right mind by insisting that the family move into a house that had been neglected for so long.

Sid—in his right mind or not—was at the Hurt train station to greet his family at their end of their long journey from Ohio. Almost 70 years later, his oldest son Bill recalled that “the five of us . . . piled into a single-seated buggy and drove off into the country darkness.” The small boy had no idea what time of night it was, only that he had been reunited with his Papa and that his Uncle Charlie and Aunt Julia Wilson welcomed the tired travelers into their dimly lit kitchen before sending them to bed for the night.

The newcomers stayed on at the Wilsons until the most critical repairs could be made to the sawmill shanty on the Dewberry farm. Katie's understandable doubts notwithstanding, Sid was thrilled to be embarking on a new chapter of his old life on the 200-acre property.

“He worked and saved for years to buy the old Homeplace,” noted his son Bill in memoirs written in 1986. “His dream was to make it into a model farm and a safe place to raise his family.”

The going would prove to be far from easy. The Dewberry farm had probably never been well-worked; Sid's father had been so crippled by arthritis that he would not have had the strength to make farming a serious profession.

“That was a right poor farm,” says Earl Dewberry, one of Katie Bell and Sid's sons, using a local expression. “The land was rough, rugged and rocky. It wasn't productive like a lot

of farms are. Not much land had been cleared. The fields were small. Our grandfather Jack Dewberry had never been in good health, so probably didn't do as much as others would have, improving the land.

“The fact that the farm had been abandoned since around the turn of the century didn't help,” continues Earl. “Even perfectly good, tillable land, Nature will retake it in about 20 years.”

Further complicating the matter was Sid's lack of farming experience. He had helped out on the farm as a child, and had hired himself out to neighboring farms during his teen years after his father died, but never had he borne full responsibility for a making an economic success out of a 200-acre piece of land.

Providing directly for the family's needs was the (relatively) easy part, says Sidney Oliver Dewberry, another son. “We raised everything on the farm. We raised corn and wheat and all sorts of vegetables and cattle and horses and pigs and chickens. We were pretty self-sufficient. One thing we had to buy was sugar, but we even had sugar cane that we made molasses out of and so got ‘sugar’ from that. I guess we had to buy coffee and maybe salt and pepper, but beyond that, we were pretty independent.”

Where Katie Bell's husband ran into difficulties was in trying to grow tobacco, the traditional mainstay of many family farms up and down the Piedmont in Virginia and North Carolina. A huge market in ‘bright leaf’ tobacco dominated the region's agriculture, much as tobacco had dominated Tidewater Virginia two centuries earlier. (Piedmont farmers did not plant tobacco to the exclusion of everything else, however—an important lesson in crop rotation that their Tidewater counterparts learned too late.)

Determined to get into the tobacco game, Sid studied the ins and outs of growing the “noxious weed,” taking tips from neighbors and friends who were willing to help the aspiring young farmer make a go of it. Even with assistance from more experienced growers, his success was mixed, says his son Earl.

“Frankly, we didn’t think he was very good with tobacco. Mother said he often came back from the tobacco market with a long face. Most of the time, the crop didn’t bring what he thought it should bring.”

Fortunately for the family, Sid was at least as much pragmatist as dreamer. Even before growing his first crop of tobacco, he knew that other business ventures would be useful to help make ends meet. In 1920, he and his brother-in-law Charlie Wilson bought a sawmill located on a branch of a creek about a half-mile from the shanty, at a spot where the Dewberry, Blackwell and Worley farms came together. Like his grandfather Ambrose Rucker, the original owner of the farm, Sid knew that the land’s timber could be turned into good, saleable lumber. Logs were cut down and pulled by horse to the sawmill. Most of the lumber was sold, but Sid kept some back to build an addition to the house and a few necessary outbuildings. (See chapter on the Homeplace, page 241.)

Although Charlie Wilson was apparently had a turn for milling, the duo ultimately couldn’t make a serious success out of the mill.

“I heard Papa say that Charlie Wilson was a good sawyer,” says Earl Dewberry. “He wouldn’t leave any bark on the boards. When you’re sawing a log, it’s easy to cheat and let some of the corners of the boards be bark. But Uncle Charlie didn’t leave any bark edges. He sawed it clean. Even so, I’d say their venture was both short-lived and unprofitable.”

While Sid occupied himself with figuring out how to secure an income from the farm, Katie Bell gave birth to another son: Raymond Allen, in 1920. A year later, the first of the Dewberry brood—Willis Elbert or Bill—faced a most unwelcome prospect: school. The seven-year-old felt strongly that working on the farm was “ample education for anyone.” His parents firmly disagreed. Off Bill went without further ado to the three-room schoolhouse called Hill Grove, located three miles from the farm. His younger brother Claude followed a year later.

To reach Hill Grove, the boys walked each way, often teaming up for most of the distance with the Worley children or other neighborhood kids. Everything in the rudimentary school was bought and paid for by the students’ parents, including the well-known Dick and Jane reading primer. According to Bill Dewberry, the kids excelled at missing school or cutting classes, an art known as “playing hooky.” No one thought twice about wearing second-hand clothes to school or using second-hand supplies. Making do was simply part of life.

The same held true at home. Hardship was taken in stride. Winters in particular brought challenges to anyone living on a farm in the 1920s. Cold days and nights were endured without a furnace or indoor bathroom. Most children walked or rode horseback to school, where a wood burning stove heated the schoolroom. Cold and snow were not excuses to stay home. Chores were more difficult. Animals had to be fed and watered every day, often in the dark, even when the snow was deep and water froze in the troughs. In the evening, families lit kerosene lamps for light. A lucky few gathered around a battery-powered radio to listen to comedy programs. Illness also worsened in the winter. People frequently died from the flu, pneumonia, diphtheria or other diseases. Doctors often arrived too late—if at all—and their remedies might or might not work.

The Dewberry family got its first taste of serious illness in the spring of 1922, when five-year-old Phyllis June fell victim to pneumonia. Bill was sent to stay with the Worleys; Claude and Raymond were deposited with the Wilsons. The doctor’s efforts to save the little girl failed. On April 5, she died, leaving behind broken-hearted parents and three bewildered brothers. Her death was far from an exception: the mortality rate among children who caught pneumonia or diphtheria was between 80 and 90 percent.

Both Sid and Katie Bell grieved over their loss, but Katie Bell seemed to take it especially hard. When her next child was born, in February 1923, she hoped for a little girl to take the place of Phyllis June. Instead, she got Earl Rudolph,

a small, tough, cheerful child who seemed to know instinctively that his mother's spirit needed a boost. For the rest of Katie Bell's life, Earl never lived more than a few miles away from her.

The loss of Phyllis June may have prompted her parents to find consolation in church. According to Bill, not long after Earl's birth, the family became more regular in its attendance at New Prospect Baptist Church. The church's name was a bit of a misnomer, having been founded as Mount Pleasant Baptist Church well over a century earlier. Sid's great-grandfather, Rev. Reuben Dawson Rucker, had been pastor at New Prospect just after the Civil War. Katie Bell would attend New Prospect right up to her death in 1985.

Regular attendance at the church possibly helped sustain Katie Bell in more than her loss of Phyllis June. In spite of having a husband and children, life on a somewhat isolated farm could be lonely for a girl who had been raised in a small town with neighbors on either side and right across the street. Even young Bill found it took some getting used to initially; his first five years had been spent in "well lighted towns with much traffic, along with people and noise. These surroundings were new experiences. The darkness and stillness at night were awesome. The days were long and lonesome."

Some of the loneliness was offset by the proximity of neighbors, including a number of African-American families whose roots in the area were as deep or deeper than the original Rucker family—Sid's grandparents. At least one black neighbor had been born on the Rucker farm—Russell White. He had arrived in the world in 1876, the year that Jack Dewberry and Molly Rucker married and set up house-keeping in the sawmill shanty on land given the bride as a wedding gift from her father, Ambrose Rucker.

Fortunately for town-raised Katie Bell, the family's black neighbors did not hesitate to answer calls for assistance with a helping hand and advice.

"Our closest neighbor was Mary Jane, who had been

born a slave," says Earl Dewberry. "She was the greatest help to Mother in raising us children. I remember 'buying' an old coin from her when I was about 12 years old. It was a coin minted in about 1838. She let me have it for a nickel with the understanding that if I ever sold it, we'd split the proceeds. Mary Jane is long gone, but I still have that coin."

One of the most colorful couples living nearby was "Aunt" Roxie and "Uncle" Simon Anthony. Roxie regularly indulged in "words not ordinarily heard in polite company," recalled Bill many years later; her husband Simon specialized in whipping up homemade libations based on corn and rye—a talent for concocting moonshine that occasionally landed him in the County Detention Center in Chatham, the county seat. Both were beloved for their generosity and kindness.

The Dewberrys benefited in countless ways from the experience of their country neighbors. Families helped each other with harvests, butchering, canning, childbirth and myriad other chores. For Katie Bell, who had arrived at the farm with no experience in rural living, the ability to draw on local wisdom was a godsend.

In June 1925, Katie gave birth again, this time to a longed-for girl: Dorothy June. Sid conceded—probably somewhat reluctantly—that his brood was outgrowing his ability to extract income from the farm. Even with about 20 acres under cultivation, he wasn't making as much money as he needed to stay ahead of his family's needs. The prosperity of the Roaring Twenties seemed to stop short of the top of the gravel lane that led to the Dewberry home. If that was the case, he concluded, then he would simply go out into the world and bring some of the prosperity home.

"Papa wasn't alone," says Earl Dewberry. "Farmers had a hard time then. You barely got enough to eat. So I think he felt he needed to supplement his income. So he worked away a lot of the time."

Sid arranged to rent out some of the farm's acreage and accepted seasonal construction jobs in New York City. His plan was to plant crops in the spring, work up North for a

few months, and then return to see the farm through its autumn and winter cycles.

For the next few years, Sid returned from his time away with “more money than we’d had for a long time,” says Bill. By putting away \$100 a week on a job Sid was able to buy the family a brand-new Chevrolet at a time when the average family income in the U.S. was \$1300 for the year.

Just when things were looking up, the peace of the household was shattered unexpectedly in mid-May 1927 when Sid’s sister Lee (Clemenita) committed suicide. She had joined her brother’s household a few months earlier after her husband of nine years passed away in February 1926, leaving her with three daughters and two stepchildren to raise alone.

Katie Bell reminisced about the incident many years later: “I suppose one of my most vivid memories is one Saturday, when we had to go to the store. My husband hitched up the horses, and I put Raymond and Earl in the buggy. We left Dot at home with Lee, my husband’s sister, who was staying with us. Bill and Elmo (a Wilson cousin from up the road) were there. Bill was about nine or ten and the two boys were playing marbles outside when we left. We knew we wouldn’t be gone too long, so we left Dot sleeping on the bed.”

Lee’s young nephews Bill Dewberry and Elmo Wilson heard the single gunshot while playing outside the house.

“We looked at each other and thought for a second that it was a distant clap of thunder,” says Bill. “Then the baby—Dorothy—screamed. I rushed into the house and found Dorothy with her face covered with blood. Aunt Lee was on the bed in the adjoining bedroom. The sight was so horrifying to me that my mind could not put it together.”

Fearing that an intruder had shot their aunt, the boys scrambled to fetch neighbor Russell White, who hurried back to the house and made the boys wait outside. In the meantime, Bill grabbed the baby Dot and made tracks to another neighbor.

“When we returned from the store,” said Katie Bell, “we saw Bill running up the road with the baby in his arms and

blood all over her face. He was on his way to Aunt Mary Jane, an elderly black woman. He told us something had happened to Aunt Lee, so he grabbed Dot and ran to get help. We entered the house and found the most horrific site we could ever imagine. Lee had shot herself and one of the fragments of the shot entered into Dot’s forehead, but it had not hurt her in any other way. The doctor advised us not to remove it, as it would leave such a scar.”

The tragic incident was rarely discussed afterward, but left an indelible impression on 13-year-old Bill.

“The hardest ordeals we had faced as a family were losing Phyllis and the death of Aunt Lee,” he wrote in 1986, more than a half century after both events.

Fortunately, the sadness of losing Aunt Lee was offset slightly by another addition to the Dewberry household in the winter of 1927: Sidney Oliver Dewberry.

With the birth of his seventh child, Sid decided that he needed to stay closer to home, while simultaneously earning a solid income. He took a job with Virginia’s highway department. (His brother-in-law Charlie Wilson also worked for the agency.) One assignment involved supervising construction of a new 1,400-foot bridge across the Staunton River connecting Hurt to Altavista—an ideal job just a few miles from the farm.

Ideal, that is, until Sid slipped off the partially-built span and plummeted 50 feet into the Staunton, knocked unconscious on the way down when his head struck a steel beam. Fortunately he landed in water deep enough to cushion the blow, and fellow bridge workers fished him out immediately and ferried him to the family doctor. When his son Bill got the news he ran five miles from the farm to the doctor’s office in record time.

“He was laid up for two or three days and then returned to help finish the bridge,” said Bill. “He was 42 years old when he was hurt, and I believe this was the only serious injury he ever suffered.”

As soon as the Hurt-Altavista bridge was completed, Sid turned part of his attention to making a go of another fami-

ly business venture: running a foundry with his cousin Floyd Simpson. Simpson had been running the foundry—located in downtown Hurt next to the Hurt General Store—with a partner, A.B. Dalton. When the foundry burned in September 1929, Floyd asked his cousin Sid to help him rebuild on the same site.

Operating a forge was far from an unusual undertaking in Pittsylvania County, where rich deposits of ore had encouraged entrepreneurs to mine the earth and manufacture metal products since the days of the American Revolution. During the Revolution and later Civil War, Pittsylvania rifles were considered among the finest to be had. In the 1920s, call for weaponry was minimal, but other products were useful. Sid and Floyd were optimistic that the forge would fill a valuable niche. The pair was able to reopen for operation in February 1930, five months after the fire.

But just Sid and Floyd were putting the finishing touches on their enterprise, the country suffered one of the most traumatic events in its history: the stock market crash on Black Thursday, October 24, 1929. The next five years were some of the most trying times the nation has ever known. In 1930, about 20 percent of the American labor force was out of work. And the number would keep climbing.

Determined to succeed, the cousins bought scrap metal from dealers and residents, sometimes conducting collecting forays around the countryside in their Model-T Ford truck. The metal was melted down and poured into various molds and, once cool, cleaned, polished and delivered. Among the foundry's products were sash weights for windows, and stove bowls and grates. Plough points and andirons were another specialty. One item was marketed specifically to the region's tobacco farmers: flue eyes for curing barns.

“Do you know what a flue eye is?” asks Earl Dewberry. “To heat a tobacco curing barn, a farmer would build a big rock box about the size of a coffin to house the fire. Then he would put a flue eye made out of cast iron on the outside of the box and connect it to a 10” diameter pipe to distribute

the heat through the barn. The flue eye sealed the pipe to the fire box.”

Initially, farmers did not feel the effect of the Depression to the same degree as their city counterparts. Most were able to keep food on the table by doing what they had always done: growing their own food supplies. But as the economy stagnated, all but the most self-sufficient farmers felt the pinch.

“Prices for farm products fell so low that it did not pay to produce them,” said Bill Dewberry in his memoirs in 1986. “Wheat and corn fell to as low as 50 cents a bushel. It cost twice that to grow the grain. From 1930 to 1933 our tobacco brought just about what it cost to grow the crop . . . nothing at all for labor.”

As farmers—including the Dewberrys—watched their crops falter in the marketplace, the demand for the foundry's products fell. The operation soon converted to a part-time schedule.

Sid, fortunately, had his highway department job, and a good reputation for construction projects. He worked on a bridge across the Leatherwood Creek, north of Martinsville, as part of a highway project between Danville and Roanoke. He also helped to build the Vista Theater in nearby Altavista. (Still standing and slated for rehabilitation as a community center.) Another job involved a post office in Lynchburg, also close to home. Son Bill helped with all three projects.

Having a steady income became ever more important as two more Dewberry children joined the fold: Betty Louise in 1931 and Elna Mae “Pat” in 1933. Happy to have work anywhere, Sid went back to a schedule that sometimes took him away from home for weeks at a time. One was working on an airplane hangar at Langley Field near Newport News, Virginia. Bill joined his father on that project, too.

“Bill also went with Papa to work on raising the level of Pedlar Dam, which supplies Lynchburg with water,” says Earl Dewberry. “Bill told me they raised the level of the dam

about 30 feet, because the area needed more water. The water from Pedlar is piped into Lynchburg.”

In 1933, the country’s economic crisis hit its worst period. Bad as it was, the news paled in comparison to the revelation that Sid had developed leukemia, complicated by diabetes. His doctor pronounced him terminal. For the next four years, before he died, much of the family’s attention was given to building a new 10-room house for Katie Bell and the children. When he passed away in mid-April 1937, Sid left a 40-year-old widow and eight children, six of whom were under the age of 18.

“My most vivid childhood memory was when my father died,” says Betty Dewberry Ackerman, who was only six at the time. “He was in the casket in the living room, and my mother came into the room just sobbing, with my brother Bill and Virginia, Mother’s sister, on either side, holding onto her. She was absolutely devastated and not holding anything back.”

The weeks following the funeral “were the most discouraging times I can remember,” said eldest son Bill many years later. Sid had been too ill at the end to provide his wife and children with good instructions for starting and tending the year’s crops. While Bill and his mother struggled to figure out how to plant, her mother, Mamma Wilkinson (also known as Miss Lillie), arrived to help for a few weeks and provide encouragement.

To make matters worse, little Betty contracted pneumonia, the same illness that had carried off Phyllis 15 years earlier.

“Even the mention of the word frightened Mother nearly out of her wits,” said Bill. A registered nurse was brought in to help. When Betty’s condition continued to worsen, she was admitted to the hospital in Lynchburg. Her mother took the train every day to see her daughter. To everyone’s great relief, a three-week stay, followed by a long recuperative period, did the trick. Katie Bell was spared the loss of another daughter.

Figuring out how to keep the family’s finances above

water was the next challenge. One decision was easy: Katie Bell decided to get out of the foundry business.

“Floyd Simpson bought Papa’s part out,” says Earl. “He paid Mother \$500 for his share of the foundry.”

Floyd later moved the foundry out of town to his own property.

“Our mother didn’t have anybody really to help her out,” says Sid Dewberry. “She owned the farm, which was great. She had no mortgage, and she had the nice house that our father had built in 1935. But on the farm, you don’t have any income. You don’t have a regular paycheck. So my mother really had a hard time raising the rest of us who were still pretty young. Somehow or another she did. And I think she managed things very well.”

Twenty-three-year-old Bill tried to help, not always to his siblings’ satisfaction. “I think he thought after Papa died he was the man of the house and that gave him the right to discipline us,” says Betty, who was one of the two youngest in the family. “All we needed to hear was, ‘You do this—.’ And we did it.”

“There was a need there,” says Earl. “And I guess he filled it the best he could. We had a lot to do around the farm to stay afloat. In addition to the garden and fields, we had cows to milk and attend to; horses and pigs, too. We had just enough cows for milk for table use for ourselves. Likewise, we had just enough hogs for the table. We also had chickens, which gave Mother a way to supplement her income. We built a chicken house, and raised and sold fryers. She and the girls—Dot, Betty and Pat—dressed fryers and we sold them during that 8-year period after Papa died.”

One of the best decisions the family made after Sid’s death was to secure an experienced sharecropper to work much of the farm.

“We rented to another neighbor,” says Earl. “He raised good tobacco and helped us pay for the farm.”

Just when it appeared that the worst was over, Katie Bell endured another blow. In May 1942, her second oldest son Claude was taken prisoner of war in the Philippines—news

that spurred Katie's determination to simplify her life, sell the farm and move into Altavista. She had had enough of living in isolation.

"As a boy I can remember her dissatisfaction with slow country life," says Bill. "Also, the place held some bad memories for her. Phyllis had died there. Aunt Lee, Aunt Kate [Sid's sister] and now Papa were all buried within a hundred feet of the front porch. When word came that Claude had been wounded and later taken as a prisoner of war, it was too much. She would sell and buy a home in town. It would take several years for the plan to materialize, but it continued to grow in the back of her mind."

When word reached Katie Bell in the summer of 1945 that Claude had died several months earlier, still a prisoner, the news spurred her to action. She bought a house in Altavista and sold 100 acres of the farm to a new owner. The other 100 she deeded to Earl, in exchange for his willingness to pay off the mortgage on the Altavista house.

"I went to the surveyor and we cut a hundred acres off of the farm, which she sold and used to make a down payment on the house in town," says Earl.

The family's new home was a solid brick house on Main Street in Altavista. Betty, who was 14 at the time of the move, was delighted with the change.

"I could walk to school and walk to the drugstore and other places. I even got a job at the drugstore working behind the counter, which I really liked. You would walk to the theater, too. It was all together different from life on the farm."

In time, Betty and her younger sister Pat graduated from high school and joined most of their siblings in going out into the world, away from Pittsylvania and the poverty that had marked their childhoods. Bill became a Baptist minister;

both Ray and Sid became engineers; Earl worked in the insurance industry for most of his career. Like their brothers, Dot, Betty and Pat all married, had children and pursued part-time careers.

Jokes Sid Dewberry, Katie Bell's seventh offspring: "All of Mother and Papa's kids have done well. Most of us got a college education, pursued a career and raised our children. None of us have gone to jail for anything . . . yet!"

Only Earl and his wife Polly stayed nearby; the other six living children moved to other places. All, however, came home regularly to visit Katie Bell, bringing their children and, later, grandchildren with them. In her later years, Katie Bell was known affectionately as Mama Dewberry, or BoBo, a nickname bestowed on her by one of her many grandchildren.

Although she suffered many privations in her life, one area in which Katie Bell was never in short supply was descendants. To date, Katie Bell and Sid's fruitful union has produced nine children, 26 grandchildren, 40 great-grandchildren, and 20 great-great grandchildren. For most, "Papa Dewberry"—Albert Sidney Johnston Dewberry—is a vague memory or just a name. But many of Katie Bell's descendants enjoyed an opportunity to know her before she died in 1985.

When she passed away, Katie Bell was buried at New Prospect Baptist Church, outside of Hurt, the church she had attended for more than 60 years. Many years earlier she had arranged for Sid and Phyllis to be moved to the church cemetery from the small family cemetery located near the house on the farm. She could rest at peace at last near her long-dead husband and daughter.

