

## **Tribute to Kim Bell**

### **Rotary November 14, 2005**

Today we are honoring Kimsy Bell, better known to us as Kim. Kim will you stand so that our newer members may put a face to your name.

Kim was born in 1920, in Columbiana County near Lisbon Ohio. He was the youngest of five, with three older bothers and one older sister. Kim arrived in the usual way - that is: delivered at home by a doctor who arrived in a horse drawn carriage.

His father was a farmer, school wagon driver and sawmill operator. Kim remembers the school wagon being slow and cold in winter. I asked if he rode the wagon to school every day – “Not if I could help it”.

Kim had a normal rural childhood. He helped on the farm, learned to run the sawmill, and developed a love a mechanics. One of his fonder memories was of 4-H - something he continued to participate in well into his late teen years. It was at a 4-H event in Canton that he met a young lady that he took an interest in. Margaret lived 40 miles away, but he bridged the distance in a 1931 Model A Ford. Margaret’s family liked him and often invited him for Sunday dinner.

We’ll come back to Margaret and her family in a second.

In October of 1942, Kim was called into his countries service. Kim asked to be a mechanic, a job for which he felt skilled. This being the Army, he was made a medic. But being a medic really suited Kim well. He felt very

comfortable carrying a medical pack rather than a rifle. In 1944 he found himself on a troopship heading to England, where he was stationed in preparation for the invasion of France.

I don't have time to go into the details of his war experience. Let me just say that he survived two near misses with bouncing betty landmines, he help get troops onto the beach on D-Day, he commandeered a half track and evacuated troops who became surrounded during a German advance during the Battle of the Bulge and he used his medical skills to saved the lives of many GIs. Kim is quite modest about his impact as a medic. But at a battalion reunion a few years ago, several men approached his wife to tell her that if it had not been for Kim, they would not be alive. Kim even took the unpleasant task of retrieving the dog tags of fallen GI's very seriously. He knew that without that tag, a family would never know what had happened to their loved one. Kim's family is extremely proud of his contribution during the war.

Now back to the Margaret in Ohio. When Kim left for basic training he gave his Model A Ford to Margaret and asked her to write. "But please don't write if all your going to tell me is that you've met another man." You guessed it –Margaret never wrote. The only letter he received was from her parents, telling him that she had met another and had married. As I said, Margaret's parents really liked Kim and I think they felt sympathy for him, so they invited him to come again for a Sunday dinner when he returned to the states.

And so Kim, upon his return to Ohio, borrowed his brother's car and visited the family again. It is

interesting how things work out sometimes - because the family had a younger daughter. When Kim left for the Army, Ruth had been 15 and in high school. Upon his return visit, Kim was surprised to see a beautiful 19-year-old bounce down the stairs to greet him. She was now studying nursing, so they had a lot in common and began dating. The rest is history. Ruth and Kim have been married 59 years.

Kim and his best friend from the war started a Ford Tractor agency in Lisbon. That was the beginning of a very successful career in tractor sales.

He sold the Ford agency and moved to Columbus where he eventually became the Ohio sales representative for Massey-Harris Tractors. In 1953 Massey was merged with Ferguson Tractor to become what we know today as Massey Ferguson tractor. Kim must have done well, because he was transferred to Toronto as sales rep for all of North America. He moved several times with Massey Ferguson, first to Michigan and then to Massachusetts.

In the early 1960's Kim left Massey Ferguson and formed a partnership with Frank Sims of Sims Cabs. Sims Cabs had plants in Ontario, Plain Ohio and Rockford Ill. So Kim returned to Ohio to be centrally located to the plants. It was in Ohio that Kim joined the Rotary Club of Van Wert in 1969. Kim worked for 8 more years for Massey Ferguson in Ohio and then retired.

There is a saying that you can't keep a good man down – I'd modify that to say you can't keep a hard worker retired. Kim was brought out of retirement with an

offered to start tractor cab production at Orrville Products. That's what brought Kim, Ruth and family to Wooster and Wooster Rotary in 1977.

Kim and Ruth raised two sons and a daughter. His children remember how peaceful he was – to the point of making Ruth carry out the discipline on the kids. His son Jim remembers the day Kim approached the “Birds and the Bee” topic. “You and your Buddies talking about girls?” Jim said yes. “Have any questions.” Jim said no. Talk over.

Kim's children also remember with great fondness the years Kim and Ruth lived in Wooster off Rt. 30. They called their dad the “Daniel Boone” of Ohio. He was forever dealing with skunks, chipmunks, birds or some critter that decided to take up residence in their chimney. The kids even remember a raccoon that showed up in the bathtub one day.

Kim has a love of ice cream – having hand turned the ice cream freezer ever year for over 20 years at family events. And he also gained a reputation as the family pool shark willing to challenge any one the family gatherings.

He loves music and plays the harmonica, piano, Jews harp, and is quite talented on the spoons.

He and Ruth are avid travelers. They have been throughout Canada and the US, and remember fondly a visited to the family of a Rotary Exchange student from New Zealand that they had hosted in their home in Van Wert.

Kim continued to do woodworking throughout his life. Today his home contains beautiful pieces that he built. Not small items, but substantial furniture, like a lighted curio cabinet and an eight-foot wide sideboard.

Rotarians remember the Bells best for their dedication to the auction kitchen. For years Kim and Ruth made all the soup and sandwiches themselves. They started two or three days ahead of Auction, cutting up vegetables and simmering soup bones. However, they do not take complete credit for the great tasting soup. Ruth says that every year, Gerhard Sousman, of Gerhards Bakery fame, would add something to the soup and he never told anyone what it was. To this day that ingredient remains a secret.

I will end with one final story about Kim. Two years ago his family went with him to visit the WWII memorial in Washington. Kim could still fit into his wool Army dress jacket so he wore it that day, despite the fact that it was a hot, mid-summer day. As he approached the memorial, visitors began to come up to him to shake his hand and thank him for his service. A group of school children were at the memorial and as a class project they were talking to veterans. One by one they came up to him to ask questions and to hear about his experiences during the war. After two hot hours, Kim had not yet seen the memorial – but for him, it was still one of his most memorable days.

Kim Bell, we thank you for your service to your country and to the Wooster Rotary Club.