

July 18, 2024

Samuel Jordan Bell
1931 ~ 2024

A calm, stoic man, Samuel Jordan Bell, who admittedly preferred nature over people, passed away on June 20, 2024, at his home in Bandera. He was born in Crystal Springs, Miss., in 1931, to Lucille and Samuel Otto Bell. As a youngster and teen, Sam could be found most days behind a mule and a plow on the family farm, where they grew primarily tomatoes and cabbage.

His early life was like that of many rural farm youth in the 1930s - full of a lot of hard work and exhaustion. He didn't care too much about formal schooling and preferred to be outside learning from nature. After 8th grade, he and formal school parted ways and he worked full-time on the farm. If you have ever read the book by Jimmy Carter called "An Hour Before Daylight," about his life growing up in Plains, Ga., during the same period, it describes a lot of his early life. He said the only difference was that the Carters had a lot more money than the Bells did. 1950 proved to be a life-changing year for Sam, when he joined the U.S. Airforce and was found to have an amazing aptitude for mechanics. He was quickly assigned to the first jet airplane mechanics division, which was a fast-track, hot-shot mechanics unit solely dedicated to the development of the B-47.

It was thought that the way the U.S. could win the Korean war was to get long-range jet bombers into the Korean conflict. Sam's Unit was dedicated to the development of the B-47 Stratojet, the first swept wing jet bomber and the first to be designed to carry nuclear weapons. When the jet made its first, cross-Atlantic flight from the U.S. to a base in England, Sam and the rest of the mechanics unit went along to England with it. He spent most of the Korean war in England, where they supported air missions to Korea.

After an honorable discharge from the Airforce in 1954, Sam had a "right place at the right time" moment, because he had the skills

desperately desired by U.S. commercial airlines that were only then beginning to acquire jet airplanes. In 1955, he began a 38-year career with Delta Airlines, starting out in Dallas, then Arlington, Va., and finally Baltimore.

He was made the youngest aircraft maintenance foreman in Delta history and ran a tight ship at Friendship International Airport in Baltimore (now Baltimore-Washington International Airport- BWI) for most of his career. He retired from Delta in 1990.

With his privilege to travel for free anywhere in the world, he did!

Through his work he had great stories of times when he would stand in for Delta station managers in Caracas, Venezuela, Havana, Cuba, Montego Bay, Jamaica, and San Juan, Puerto Rico. He was caught in two coups d'états, both in Caracas and in Havana, when Castro overthrew Batista in 1959.

Sam married Hazel T. Bell of Austinsville, Va., in 1954. They had one daughter, Samuela Adeen Bell, and the family lived in Annapolis, Md. Sam and Hazel were divorced in 1982.

In 1985, Sam married Eva Mae Lunney, of Darlington, Md. The couple lived in Ridgely, Md. for many years and then moved to Bandera, where they called home for the last 28 years.

Sam was a gentleman farmer and had a cow-calf operation, was a ranch caretaker, and had a hay business for many years. Mostly Sam just loved the quiet and beauty of the Texas Hill Country, and watching the “daily parade of white tail and axis deer” across the back 40.

Sam was dearly beloved by his daughter Samuela. They had many grand adventures traveling the world together over the years - Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Greece, Japan, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, Kenya, Ghana and Ethiopia. They also enjoyed trail riding in the Appalachian Mountains, and were known back in the day to be pretty good at “flat footing,” a type of dance similar to clogging.

Sam (known as Papa to the Orth-Moore grandkids) was beloved by his grandchildren Cassidy (Cass), Shea (Shady), Jordan (Jdub) and Tessa (TG) Orth-Moore.

He had a nickname for most people. We will all miss his “Papa jokes,” “sittin and spittin” on the back porch in July, and peanut parties. We will all miss his uncanny ability to diagnosis the problem with a car engine just from listening to it over the phone from the side of the road. He has helped to fix cars remotely from as far away as Kenya! His grandkids also would like to acknowledge him as the best and most patient driving instructor of all time, teaching them each to drive in the “barbwire truck,” so named because it was held together with barbwire.

Sam and his wife Eva enjoyed trail riding and traveling across the country in their motorhome for many years, looking for a place to finally settle. They found their happy spot in Bandera and remained there. Sam loved being on his ranch and watching his cows. He was able to do that pretty much up until his passing.

Sam was proceeded in death by sister Martha Haggan.

Sam is survived by his wife Eva Mae Bell; his daughter Samuela Adeen (Bell) Orth-Moore and her husband David; his siblings Montora McDonald (and her husband Billy) and Otto K. Bell. Sam is also survived by his step-children Vicki Gilbert Alldredge and Scott Gilbert; step-grandchildren Benjamin and Emma Gilbert, Jeff Kelly, Alexandra Mascolo Caruso, and Matthew Mascolo; great-grandchildren Colton Caruso and Dominic Mascolo; and his trusty little side-kick Heidi “Red Dog,” who will really miss him.