

## LONNIE AND JESSIE MABREY

By Amy Davis

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‘Cookeville Couple 82-Years Strong in Marriage’

**COOKEVILLE** – By the time “The Wizard of Oz” came onto the big screen in 1939, Lonnie and Jessie Mabrey had already been married eight years.



They celebrated their 10<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary the same year the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941.

When Elvis was singing “Jailhouse Rock” in 1957, the Mabreys were more than 25 years strong in their marriage, building a life together in Detroit with their 16-year-old son, Bob.

They were nearing their golden years when man first walked on the moon in 1969.

They even surpassed their diamond anniversary...six years ago.

(Pictured: Lonnie Mabrey steals a quick kiss from his wife of 82 years, Jessie).

And now – with 82 years of marriage behind them – Lonnie, who is 101, and Jessie, 99, are still going strong.

And very much in love.

“We’re pretty sure it’s the record in Tennessee, but we’re not sure about the country,” their son said. “They’re one of the longest married couples anywhere around.”

The Mabreys, who moved to Cookeville following Lonnie’s retirement from the tire business in Detroit, are still living independently and enjoying each day they can spend with each other.

But the years have rolled by fast – “too fast,” Jessie said.

Her voice is soft and pleasant with plenty of giggles, while Lonnie’s is more brusque. But that gruffness is betrayed by the twinkle in his eye – especially when he looks at his wife.

The two go ‘way back together – back to their teenage years in Jackson County, where both grew up.

They met at a Halloween party, bobbing for apples.

“Oh no!” Jessie corrected him. Then she added, pointing to his silvery stubble, “He didn’t have a beard like that then!”

“I missed the apple and got her lips,” Lonnie continued.

“I don’t think you did,” she told him. “Not for awhile.”

“Eh, that was a good memory!” Lonnie added.

What did Lonnie like about Jessie?

And what did Jessie like about Lonnie?

“Well, he treated me real nice, and we had a good time when we got together. I just liked him.”

When they got married on Aug. 11, 1931, Jessie had just turned 17; Lonnie was 19.

How did they know they’d found “the one”?

“I was looking for a woman!” Lonnie said with a chuckle. “He asked me,” said Jessie, laughter too.

What about the proposal?

“I don’t remember now,” Lonnie said.

But Jessie spoke up, saying, “I’ll tell you what he said. He said, ‘How would you like to go to Detroit with me?’ That’s what he said. He said we’d get married and he’d take me and we’d go to Detroit and work. I said I didn’t know about going to Detroit. I said, ‘I’ll think on that.’”

Then one morning while walking to school with her friends, Jessie made up her mind for sure when Lonnie drove up in his car.

“It was a little bit of a surprise,” she said. “He said he’d pick me up, but I didn’t know when. And I was with two girls, and they said, ‘Where are you going?’ and I said, ‘Don’t ask me.’”

Then, off to Albany, KY, they went.

“At that particular time, it was just one of them things,” Lonnie said. “In Tennessee, you had to ask the parents, you know? But if you’d go over to Albany and get married, you didn’t have to ask the parents.”

A week later, the young couple broke the news to Jessie’s parents, who lived on a farm in the Roaring River area. (Jessie boarded a room in Gainesboro during the school week because of the distance but always came home on the weekend.)

“I didn’t come home, so they knew why,” Jessie said. “They were about to tear me up for not letting them know!”

And she’ll never forget what her father told her: “He said, ‘You cut your throat now – you’ll have to live with it!’”

After they were married, Jessie went home with her new husband, who had his “own place” that he had helped build.

Their son, Bob, said, “He left the farm when he was 14 and went to Detroit and started working. He saved money, and when his grandfather died, he bought out all the heirs.”

But only two weeks into their marriage the Mabreys left their 144-acre farm behind when Lonnie was called back to work in Detroit. They made their home there for more than 40 years before returning to the Upper Cumberland

After all, with the Depression raging during those early years....

“It was rough,” Lonnie said.

“No place to work. You were just on your own on the farm, and you had a few cattle, pigs or whatever, and that’s what you lived on. You raised them, took care of them, sold them – that’s where you got your money.”

His son added, "A lot of times he would pick corn from sun up to sun down, and he got a bushel of corn for doing that for somebody else. And if you could sell the corn, you could get a quarter. So, he worked from sun up to sun down for a quarter a day."

Lonnie said, "At that particular time, I didn't realize what it was all about. You just took life as it came...gimme, gimme, gimme!"

We went on to work at the United States rubber Company.

"It paid good at that particular time," he said. "That was the best working place there was around."

While Lonnie worked at the tire company, Jessie worked from time to time in a restaurant or kept busy at home.

The couple's first two sons (*Billie Joe & Claude Kenneth*) died in early childhood; Bob came along in 1941. They said losing their children was the hardest thing they've been through – but at least they had each other to help them get through it.

And when they think of having been together nearly 82 years, they can hardly believe how fast the time has gone by.

"Just different things kept your mind going," Jessie said. "there was something to do all the time, and you just didn't pay much attention to the time."

Lonnie added, "It was just life. Wouldn't nothing to it."

Through the years, they have especially valued their strong faith, although lately they haven't been able to attend church services as they would like.

"We miss going to church now because he can't walk so good," Jessie said.

When Jessie isn't busy planting tomatoes and flowers in her backyard garden, the Mabreys enjoy getting together with their family.

"Grandchildren are grand!" Jessie pointed out.

Last August, a week before the Mabreys had reached their 82<sup>st</sup> wedding anniversary, they joined their son and daughter-in-law, Bob and Judy, in celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

"So we had both my parents at our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary," Bob said.

"That's unusual!"

The younger Mabrey couple say they admire the love and commitment they have witnessed from their strongly independent elders.

"I think the hardest thing (for them) was having to depend on us or someone else to take them places because they've always been independent," Judy said. "And they still are. We don't come over her (to their home) and do anything unless we have too."

Lonnie and Jessie say the key to a long, happy marriage is always talking things over.

"Agree on what you're going to do and what you're going to buy, and work it out like that," Jessie said. "That's what we always did. If we were going to buy something that was a little bit expensive, we'd get together and talk it out, reason, and both agree on it. That way, we were always satisfied. No trouble"

What's the best way to settle an argument?

Both had to think on that one.

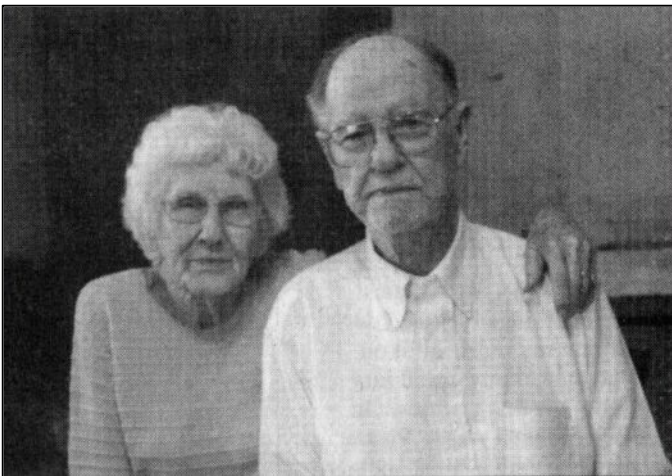
After a beat, Jessie said, "We never did fight much."

Lonnie added, "We didn't have no problems. We talked everything over. If we were going to buy more acreage on the farm, we talked it over. I talked with her before I went out and said 'yes, I want that property.'" It was always 'we want that property' – not I."

We.

And it still is.

\*Read more stories about the people of Putnam Co., TN and surrounding areas at:  
<http://www.ajlambert.com>



Lonnie and Jessie Mabrey celebrated their 82<sup>nd</sup> wedding anniversary August 11 at their home. Attending the event were their son and daughter-in-law, Bob and Judy Mabrey; three granddaughters and husbands, Carole and Tim Hof, Kathy and Kenny Bowman, and Michelle and Bill Arbogast; six great-grandchildren, Korey and wife Loren Bowman, Jared Hof, Rachel Hof, Makenzie Bowman, Alex Arbogast, and Jacob Arbogast, and Steve and Earlene Wood. The couple married in 1931 in Albany, KY.

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**Lonnie Elvis Mabrey**, b. 20 January 1912, Jackson Co., TN, md on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August 1931, Albany, KY to **Jessie (Woodrow) Mabrey**, b. 4 November 1913, Jackson Co., TN. Lonnie Elvis Mabrey, s/o **William Henderson Mabrey/Mabery II** (1874-1960) & **Dora Hawkins** (1881-1955), both buried in Dodson Branch Cemetery, Jackson Co., TN.

