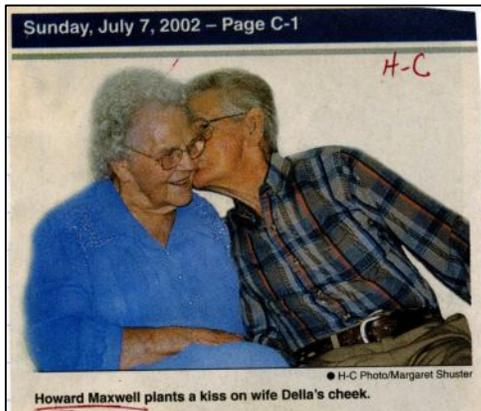


THE MARRIAGE PROS: MAXWELL COUPLE TOGETHER 74 YEARS

On June 17, Howard and Della Maxwell celebrated 74 years of marriage.

It all began when he asked if he could walk home with her one day after a church singing at the Bussell Schoolhouse, just south of Baxter. The year was 1927.



“I just asked to walk home with her, and it took off from there,” said Howard. “I asked her if she was going to sack me. I had a little old cap on I’d only had a few days. I was just breezin’ along.”

“I said, ‘Not if I don’t get the chance,’” said Della. “See, he was aiming to be cute and smart. Sacking, at that time, was a form of refusal, and then they could give you another answer and be cute about it. I said it didn’t matter if he wanted to walk with me.”

(It was a ’27 Chevrolet with a coupe and a rumble seat that cost \$400 used, interjected Howard, who can give the year, model and condition of all the cars he’s owned in his life. “He loves his cars,” said granddaughter Elaine Montgomery.)

“We had to sell it,” said Della.

“We’ve never bought a car since then that we didn’t pay cash for, and we’ve never bought a home except with cash.”

That was despite the Depression.

“We have seen the time we worked for 60 cents a day, and we’ve seen the time we had to live on about \$3 a week,” said Della. “You raised your garden, your potatoes, had your own cow that you milked, and we raised chickens and had eggs. We could pretty well buy a five-pound bag of sugar for a quarter and a 24-pound sack of flour for 75 cents. We didn’t go hungry, I’ll put it that way.”

We made a decent living, but we made it honest,” said Howard.

“You said it would be alright if I’d behave,” laughed Howard. “That’s when we started walking along together. I kept on going home with her, once or twice a week.”

They courted for about a year and got married in the middle of Lee Seminary Road. She was 18, and he was 19.

“And I’ve always said, if we didn’t like each other, one of us could take one side of the road, and the other could take the other,” said Della.

“I didn’t have any idea I’d ever marry,” said Howard. “One evening, I said, ‘I’m going on back to Detroit (to work), and she said “You’re not going ‘til I go with you.;”

Della wrote to a relative for the money to buy a dress, and they got married one Sunday morning before church.

“My Uncle Albert took us to church in a T-model Ford, and when her uncle (the pastor of their church) came around, I went to him and asked him if he would marry us,” said Howard. “He stood on the side of the car, and we drove out and went down a road and stopped there and we were married, and then went back to church.”

“Our witnesses were one of his uncles and his four cousins,” said Della.

Church weddings were uncommon at that time, especially in the country.

“Nobody in those days knew anything about a church wedding,” said Della. “They might have in the towns. That wasn’t the way like it is today.”

Two weeks after they married, the Maxwells departed for Detroit. They stayed there for about three years, then moved back to Cookeville, where they’ve lived ever since.

The Maxwells are proud that, in their 74 years, they’ve paid cash for everything after a lesson they learned the hard way.

“The first car he ever bought, he didn’t have a job that was really worthwhile,” said Della. “I’ve never had as much trouble in my life putting money in the bank as I had then. They took my fingerprints, and I finally got a little money in the bank, and he took it out in less than a week’s time and bought a car. We lost that car, and it was a good lesson.”



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Della and Howard Maxwell in their garden. ● H-C Photo/Margaret Shuster

“We’ve always worked hard,” said Della. “When you make a living, you learn that you can’t have this and you can’t have that, and you learn to live with that, and you don’t know any different. You just do the best you can do. I can drive a nail as long as I can reach it. I’ve done painting, I’ve worked in the garden, I’ve plowed, I’ve cut wood, I’ve hauled in wood and I’ve made homemade pie crusts all my life.”

“We came through the Depression, so we knew what squeezing by was like,” said Howard.

(Pictured: Della (Whittaker) and Howard Maxwell in 1928)

“This generation wants things that they can do without,” said Della. “I think credit cards and things like that have ruined our world. You think you can pay it all off, and next thing you know, you’re in debt. I think it causes lots of divorces.”

“She told me one time that their generation worked physically hard, and we work mentally hard,” said granddaughter Elaine. “Our minds are taxed.”

“I think this generation’s minds are taxed because they’re trying to have too much too quick,” said Della. “If you can pay for it, go ahead and get it. If you can’t, you do without.”

Despite living through the Depression, the most difficult time the couple has ever had to endure was when they lost their only child, daughter, Vada Burton, who died of cancer at 48.

“She’s been gone 20 years. It’s the worst thing we’ve ever lived through,” said Della. “I’ve lost my parents and brothers and sisters, but it’s not like your child.”

The Maxwells have seen many changes in their 74 years of marriage.

“Life has really changed from what it was back in 1927,” said Della. “It’s a different world than what we had. When you live to not have telephones, radios, and TVs, you just don’t have much communication. We’ve always practiced going to church and have done our best to build a Christian life. That’s where we got our friendship and the things that entertained us back in that day. It was just as real to us as what people have today is to them, but it was quite different.”

Their secret to such a long and happy marriage?

“Give and take,” said Howard.

“Hard work and endurance,” added Della. “It’s not a bed of roses, and you have to take and you have to give. Whatever needs to be done in a home, you need to be able to do that; copy with it; work at it.”

The Maxwells continue to live independently and in good health at their home. Howard is 93, and Della is 92.

They putter in their garden together and enjoy a peaceful life surrounded by their family – grandchildren Elaine Montgomery and Douglas Farley, five great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

“It doesn’t seem like it’s been 74 years,” said Howard.

“I’m glad I don’t have to relive it though,” said Della. “It’s something that we’ve made it so far.”

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*See Maxwell files at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>

