

**BULDING A LEGACY**  
**'BOB'S BODY SHOP AND SALVAGE'**

By Joy McCaleb  
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Bob's Body Shop Still Going Strong at 55 Years:

**COOKEVILLE** – Old traditional family-owned businesses are a rarity these days, especially one with more than 50 successful years and still going strong. Bob's Body Shop and Salvage has always been family-owned and operated and is one of Cookeville's oldest and finest success stories.



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(Pictured: Bob Hill, owner of Bob's body Shop, pauses for a recent photo).

Owner Bob Hill and family have been in business since Oct. 6, 1958 – with 51 years at the current location at 669 W. Broad Street.

"It was a family business from the start," Hill said. "My wife, Jerry, took care of the books and now my daughter does.

"My father-in-law was in the business and I went to work for him because I was hungry, I guess," he said with the well-known joking nature witnessed by many of Hill's family and friends.

Working side-by-side in the busy office are nephew Steve Hill and son-in-law Bill Grogan. Hill's daughter, Rhonda Grogan, and grandsons, Dusty Hill and Blake Grogan, and great-nephew Brody Hill have been working with the family business since they reached working age.

They recalled many good memories of growing up as a member of the Bob's Body Shop crew.

"I started working in the family business when I was 18 with my mother keeping the books," said Rhonda. "I remember when I was a little girl getting to go on wrecker calls with Daddy. Sometimes when winching cars out of places, the front end of the wrecker would come off the ground."

Hill's grandson, Blake, also remembers trips in the wrecker.

“I was raised in that shop and have gotten an education there that you can’t get in books – life-long lessons,” Blake said. “One of my earliest memories was when my Pa would pick me up on Saturday and take me junking. We would go to the junkyard and go



through the old cards and find change, toys, just junk under the seats. It was like buried treasures for me.”

(Pictured: The Hill family, from left, are Bill Grogan, Blake Grogan, Bob Hill, Dusty Hill, and Rhonda Grogan).

Son-in-law Bill Grogan began his career at Bob’s Body Shop in 1983 and said despite the belief that it is difficult to work with your in-laws, that was not the case with Bob as his boss.

“Bob has been a good boss,” Bill said. “We have worked side-by-side for 30 years and have never had a cross word or disagreement.

“The auto repair industry has changed quite a bit since I began in 1983,” he continued. “Cars used to be all metal. Now there is a lot of plastic, fiberglass and aluminum.”

The business has seen its share of changes, from the manner in which vehicles are made to the parts and the maintenance of those vehicles. There is also the advancing of computers in the maintenance and in the office.

“It used to be we were sending invoices and statements, writing checks along with a hand-written payroll,” Rhonda said. “Now with computers, it’s all about pushing a button.”

While the landmark graveyard of wrecked vehicles can be seen on Highway 70, the business actually started out on Scott Street and then went to Jefferson Avenue where Bob said, “Hobby Lobby was my junk yard. Back then I had maybe 20 or 30 cars.”

In the office of Bob’s Body Shop is a total of more than 125 years of experience in the automobile industry shared by Bob, Bill, and Steve. Besides the Hill family, there are 20 employees.

“We have had a lot of loyal employees through the years,” Bill said.

Bob’s Body Shop and Salvage is still a blooming business with two locations on Highway 70 and 45 acres of wrecked vehicles. The business specializes in vehicle bodywork but also provides a number of other vehicle mechanical services to customers

all over Tennessee. The massive “graveyard” of vehicles provides parts for numerous makes and models – cars, trucks, vans and such.

“We do it all- everything but upholstery,” Hill said. “Bodywork, paint, mechanical, we are a full-service establishment. We work with individuals, companies, and even insurance companies.

While Hill believes his business is about taking care of vehicles, he said his family business success is because he is attuned to taking care of people – by taking care of his customer’s vehicle needs and keeping his employees working and gain-fully employed.

Hill is not afraid to work himself.

For more than 56 years he has been starting early in the morning and staying until closing time. He said he believes hard work and perseverance are the ingredients to make a successful business and raised his children with those same business-minded principles.

“Daddy has always been a hard worker,” Rhonda said. “I have seen him many times have surgery and leave the hospital and go right back to work. He is one strong man.”

Hill was born and raised in Putnam County; he is one of six children who worked like many old timers selling corn and watermelons on the square. If he were lucky, he would have enough money to pay for a trip to “the movies.”

Bob and wife Jerry met in high school and married in 1950. They had two children Rhonda Grogan and Richard Hill.

Jerry died in 1993 from complications of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), as did their son, Richard, in 2003.

Richard had spent his career at the business and following closely behind is his son Dusty. Now there is another youngster to be raised at the Body Shop – a great-grandson Hutson Grogan.

“My hope would be that Blake, Dusty and Hutson keep the family business going and with the same reputation it has now,” Rhonda said. “The main thing I have learned from Daddy is that you are only as good as your word; he grew up in a time when your word and a hand shake was all you needed to do business.”

Perhaps that is Bob’s secret for his 50 plus years of successful business.

### **Bob Hill**

b. 20 September 1933 md on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 1950 to , b. 7 February 1933 – d. 31 May 1993, buried in Hill Cemetery, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN.

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