

Norcatur graduates celebrate 60 years as sweethearts

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Although Bill and Dorothy Woods grew up around Norcatur and had known each other most of their lives, they said that they didn't begin dating until well after he returned from service in World War II.



Bill Woods

After a year of courtship, they tied the knot before a judge in Crosbyton, Texas, on Jan. 19, 1952, and celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary last month.



D. Woods

The former Dorothy Lake was born on April 21, 1925, on a farm in Norton County, but said she lived with her grandparents, Ammon and Mattie Lake, on their farm north of Norcatur.

She attended the Blue Star School until third grade, then went to live with her mother, Vera Lake, in Norton. She went to high school in Alma for two years, then returned to Norcatur, where she graduated in 1944. Besides staying with her grandparents, she also worked for her uncle and aunt, Frank and Besie Lake.

After graduating from high school, she said, she worked at a cafe in Norcatur owned by Clyde and Katie Rapp.

"Norcatur was a bustling town at that time," she recalled. "We had a newspaper, variety store, two cafes, a theater, two grocery stores, elevators, two banks, a hardware store, locker plant and several others businesses."

Mr. Woods was born on July 10, 1924, in Topeka, the son of George and Eunice Woods, and he moved to Norcatur to help his grandfather, Oscar Tolle. He said his father died from pneumonia when he was 2 and his mother later married Roy Huff. He attended school in Norcatur and graduated from Norcatur Rural High School in 1942.

Both have vivid memories of the "Dirty 30s." Mr. Wood said he remembers the dust clouds rolling in and how the sky would get dark with so much dirt in the air. The chickens would go to roost when that happened, he said, any time of the day.

Swarms of grasshoppers ate everything in their path, including vegetation and fence posts, he said, and when the crew stopped for lunch, they had to push their pitchfork handles into the haystack, or the grasshoppers would eat them.

Mrs. Woods said her grandmother would put wet towels over the windows to keep the dirt out and they set the table with the dishes upside down to try to keep them clean.

"My grandfather would put rope from the water tank to the barn so he could get there to take care of the horses and cattle," Mrs. Woods said. "We always had a big garden in spite



THE WOODS FAMILY in 2011, from left, daughters Barbara Brooks and Debby Crider, and their parents, Dorothy and Bill Woods.

of the drought, but irrigated it with the water from the windmill."

Mr. Woods said he had to step out to get into the military, since his grandfather wanted him to stay on the farm.

"When it was time for me to be drafted... during World War II," he said, "I learned that my grandfather had gone to Oberlin and asked the draft board to take my name off the list so I could help him on the farm. When I learned about it, I immediately enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps."

He took his boot training at the Marine Corps Air Station in El Centro, Calif., then was sent overseas where he was an aircraft mechanic in Hawaii, then served on transportation duty in China.

"I was in Hawaii when we got word that the war was over on Aug. 14, 1945," he recalled, "and the whole base celebrated with a big party, which included hula dances by the natives."

After his discharge on Aug. 6, 1946, he returned to Norcatur and worked for \$1 a day for Vic Van Gundy, helping with farm work.

"We farmed with horses before switching over to tractors," Mr. Woods said. "Later, I started doing some terracing for Mr. Van Gundy, then went to work for Bill Lamb, a terracing contractor in Norton. He asked me to go to Spur, Texas, where he did terracing during the winter months."

It was during that time, he said, that the young couple started dating. Dorothy was caring for her elderly grandparents at the time.

"Entertainment during our courtship was mostly going to the movies and dances," she said. "After we decided to get married, I accompanied him to Texas and we went to the courthouse and got married."

"We had no honeymoon, as Bill had to get back to work."

"After Bill started his own business, Woods Terracing, in 1960, we decided to move from Norcatur to Oberlin in 1974 so he would be more centrally located with his work - and we've been here ever since," she said.

The couple had two daughters, Barbara and Debby, who attended school in Norcatur.

"When the girls were growing up and were in the Happy Hustlers 4-H Club," Mrs. Woods said with a laugh, "I had to learn to sew - by force."

When Barbara came home with an outfit to make with herringbone checked material, and didn't know how to match it, I had to help her. The girls and I even drove to Kansas City to find a matching hat and gloves.... When she entered it in the county 4-H competition, it qualified for state and won a grand championship at the Kansas State Fair."

Since moving to Oberlin, Mrs. Woods, known throughout the area for her culinary talent, has cooked at the Downtowner, Green Lantern and Frontier cafes. She is especially known for her homemade pies. She was a member of the Norcatur Rebekah Lodge until it disbanded and still is a member of the Royal Neighbors Lodge there.

Mr. Woods retired in 1991 and enjoyed working with the Mini-Sappa Antique Engine and Thresher Show for a few years while his wife helped in the kitchen. He is a member of the Oberlin American Legion, serving twice as commander, and also has a lifetime membership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Herndon.

Their family includes daughters Barbara and Barry Brooks of Atlanta, and Debby and Mark Crider of Oak Ridge, Tenn.; grandchildren Grant Brooks, deceased; Amber and Matt Norman, Tate, Cole and Miles, Atlanta; Farah Brooks, Phoenix; and Nicholas, Christopher and Anthony Crider, Oak Ridge, as well as a great-grandson Nolan Crider.

"We have always enjoyed doing things together," they agreed. "Since retiring, our traveling has been mainly to visit our families. We always try to visit them once a year."

They said their daughters came to help them celebrate their 60th anniversary last month and prepared an anniversary dinner for them.



BILL AND DOROTHY WOODS (above) in 1983. The couple (below) were honored with a reception for family and friends on their Golden Wedding Anniversary in January 2002.



THE WOODS FAMILY in 1956 (from left) included Bill Woods holding daughter Debby, and Dorothy Woods holding daughter Barbara.