

Jimmy Ray Ball

April 12, 2022

Jimmy Ray Ball, 91 years old, or “Jim” as he was usually known, succumbed to the vicissitudes of age and a life well lived. He was able to continue to live at home due to the support of his son-in-law, Phil Washburn, who in the last two years picked up the duties and many tasks required of maintaining a home in Jim’s rural setting. Jim lived in the Highland area of Beaver Creek, Oregon up until the last month or so when he passed away, after a brief illness, in the early morning of April 12th 2022 at Providence Willamette Falls Hospital in Oregon City, Oregon.

Jim and his (late) twin sister Ruby Fay were born at home in the depths of the Great Depression on September 7th, 1930, six miles north of Clovis, Curry County, New Mexico. They were born to Ruby Fay (Byars) Ball, age 25, and Lemuel “Lem” Beecher Ball. They, their two older siblings and father, were to lose Ruby that following evening due to complications of pregnancy related toxemia. Their residence in New Mexico was brief and connected to Lem’s work opportunities. Lem took his young family back to Texas and received loving assistance for his bereft family from his parents, John Denton Ball and Laura Alice (Marlett) Ball.

Pressures of the Great Depression were to move this young family to several towns and states in the southwest and neighboring areas as Lem sought carpentry work. These states include Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Washington state and California. By early grade school ages all of the boys in Jim’s family were working. Jim worked delivering and selling newspapers,

shining shoes/boots for the military, selling penny candy and working any labor job available to him to include plowing behind a horse, picking fruit, vegetable crops and cotton. Jim also began learning carpentry by his father's side as his father's assistant after school. These basic same jobs were also performed by his two older brothers, Maxell "Ted" and Lemuel "Tom" Ball. Not to leave out his twin sister Ruby, she also picked cotton and other crops, worked hard at canning on wood stoves and certainly kept up with the rough and tumble of having male siblings. Every penny was needed to survive and all contributed to the family.

This family lived in a variety of places and circumstances including an "Indian house" in Cowiche, Washington while their father worked in orchard related industry building fruit boxes and other carpentry related tasks. They also lived for a time in a homemade "motor home" that was a Ford Model A that had been cut in half by Lem and stretched. His only trouble was in finding wagon bows to support a canvas top. This had been a common item at lumber yards just a few years before but with the advent of the automobile and the need by so many to make due wagon bows were difficult to find. He finally found the needed bows several counties over and finalized his "motor home" by building racks or shelf type beds enough for all the family. They also, experienced the tragedy of a house fire that took all but a trunk a neighbor was able to pull to the outside through a window. Another time they lived in an area of Arkansas that often flooded. His father anticipated the coming flood by building a very tall room-sized table in the front room that he then loaded with their possessions. That time they didn't lose all their worldly goods.

Jim's father, Lem, married Golda Earl Carlock, age 18, in Arkansas in November 1933. The strain of beginning a family starting with four children for an 18 year old is unimaginable. Golda was the only mother the twins were to know. But often that strain of step-motherhood bore out in such a way that it caused the children to leave the home at the first opportunity.

This early exit from home left high school uncompleted for the twins. However, Jim's always positive attitude, large 6'4" frame and early life and work

experiences created a work ethic and willingness to seek opportunities that would not have been available to most. He began his electrical line work “grunting” or apprenticeship starting at age 15 (they thought he was older) and he was to pass his Journeyman test February 14th 1949 and worked out of Union Local 401 Reno Nevada. At his death he was a 73 year member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). He had to “fess up” to his age and so his first 3 years didn’t officially count so in reality he had 76 years as a Union Brother! His “fessing up” about his age came about when he joined the Airforce on August 30th, 1950 and had to give his real age. His subsequent military discharge was four years later on March 29, 1954.

His military experience allowed him to participate in the rebuilding of the electrical grids destroyed in World War II. His basic training was in Texas and in Florida prior to overseas deployment. Line work in the reconstruction of Europe took him to Newfoundland, Germany, Spain, England, Norway, Libya, Iceland, Greenland and Labrador. Non work related adventures while overseas included a successful seal hunt with the Eskimos. This came about when he “Borrowed’ a boat from a navy ship and with hand gestures invited the locals to go on a hunt. And yes, Jim gave them the seals. Jim could make friends under all circumstances and language was not a barrier. Although he once also displeased a German girlfriend who, fortunately for him, was a very bad shot! He watched the coronation of Queen Elizabeth while in England and also enjoyed some extra recreation and profits through cards, dice and liquor sales. As was his custom he sent the majority of his military earnings home and these “profits” were his main support.

As part of a family whose elders made the 1889 Land “Run” into Oklahoma, were Civil War Veterans, a great grandfather who was a Texas Ranger, and cousins who were kidnapped by Indians this frontier family born into the great depression knew resilience and innovation. There was nothing Jim couldn’t fix, repair, build or overhaul. No people or land that he didn’t want to know. That same pioneering spirit that beckoned the Ball family from their Virginia

home to settle into the “Dark and Bloody Ground” of Kentucky with Boone and then on into Texas in 1851 and to make the “Run” of ‘89 in Oklahoma was to bring Jim to New York after his military discharge where he met and married his late wife Melba “Jean” McFarland in December of 1954. And not unlike his best friend and fellow lineman, the late Durward Elwin “Bones” LeMaster, they were to travel to, visit, and work in, nearly every state in the US until their two daughters, Deborah Lee and Rebekah Ann became school age. Places of residence included New York, Florida, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, California and Oregon.

In 1961 they settled in the Oak Grove area of Oregon followed by his buddy Bones with his family. However, the pull was too strong and the opportunities too great for Jim and he sold their home and headed for work in Viet Nam supplying electrical power to US and allied forces. He worked as a contractor with Vinnell Corporation from 1966 to 1972. His wife and family joined him in the region to allow visits to his family who resided in Singapore and later joined him in Viet Nam for about a year. Following that year Jim, Jean and girls purchased and moved to a farm in Beaver Creek Oregon and he returned to Viet Nam with visits home for a month each year until he returned full time and worked locally as a lineman. This work would not keep his foot from itching and he soon headed to the Middle East to Saudi Arabia working first for Vinnell Corporation and later for Fluor Corporation. His work in Saudi Arabia was from 1973 to 1979 then Jean and Jim made a short return to Saudi for work in 1982 for about a year.

During his work years in Asia he and his family were to enjoy excursions in Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand. Work in Saudi allowed for vacation trips to Germany, Ireland, Italy (visiting their youngest, Becky, in boarding school), Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain (also a visit to their daughter Becky in school), Dubai, Sri Lanka, Greece, Korea and Taiwan . Jim continued his work career stateside with Hawkeye Construction as a foreman of a line crew and retired at 62. His early retirement allowed him to focus on travel in his motorhome with Jean and at times their daughter Becky.

Fishing and hunting had always been a part of his life and he carefully studied the hunting synopsis for every upcoming hunt and never missed an opportunity to be out hunting and fishing. He and his friends developed fish camps along the Snake River in Eastern Oregon and the best part of each summer was spent fishing by day and sitting around campfires by night. He also enjoyed frequent travel to Alaska from the early 1980s until 2012 to visit his daughter Debbie and her family. While in Alaska he had several adventures, panning gold, run-ins with bears, moose hunts, camping, helping to build a log house for Debbie (also with help from his oldest brother Tom) and also enjoyed dip net fishing of Copper River Red Salmon. He often said he didn't know why he and Jean stopped in Oregon to settle but he had wished they had continued on and settled in Alaska but they "had never thought of it"! More recent adventures in his last years were a trip he and Debbie made to Nevada in his truck and camper with Volkswagen Thing in tow. That trip was a retracing of his early work career in Round Mountain Nevada where he had an unexpected reunion with a friend he had not seen since 1949! Mining camps, rock buildings and roads built by Chinese miners were explored and on that same trip they went to Ichthyosaur State Park where he found one of the Ichthyosaur dinosaur fossil remains! Trips to the coast of Oregon to visit his old family friend Lindy Setchfield, a road trip to California with his girls to spend time with siblings and share stories of his youth with his two daughters in the places those events occurred. His adventures also included a train trip with his friend Rosemary Lowery to California and it was an enjoyable adventure for both.

Jim wasn't all play in his last decades; he kept up with technology using cell phones and frequently using a desktop computer to send and receive emails. He painted his house by brush and roller two times post retirement and logged his back 20 acres. While still working he built and maintained large decks around his home, built a large addition on to his home, always cut his own firewood, (in retirement) rebuilt a Ford 8-N tractor for his daughter Debbie who moved from Alaska, built a barn, fenced and cross fenced 40 acres, and built

corrals. He also built a large garage/shop, an equipment shed-port for his dozer and tractor, a shed roof off of his garage for his pontoon boat, maintained vehicles and cared for his pond/dam, planted fruit trees, put in yearly gardens and always had time to surprise his wife, daughters, sister, and or lady friends with beautiful bouquets of flowers. He was known to share whatever bounty he had whether it be firewood, garden produce, venison, elk, walnuts, fish or fruit he was always gifting and looking out for those he loved. Singing a selection of old country songs up until the very last this cheerful, hardworking, loving and adventurous man of integrity leaves behind his brother Ted Ball, his two daughters Debbie Cramer, Becky Washburn, grandsons David Officer, Will Newman, and seven great grandchildren, and several nieces and nephews as well as innumerable friends.

Tribute Wall



“ *My condolences to the Ball family. I recently purchased what I believe to be Jim's old motorhome from an insurance auction. She's got some scars, but I'm working on getting her fit for the road again. It was easy to see that someone used to love this old machine quite a bit, and it seems like that was probably Jim. Being in Air Force veteran and electrical engineer myself, it was neat to read similar things about Jim as well.*



Paul Ferrigno - June 19, 2023 at 01:01 AM



“ *Jimmy Ray Ball*

January 28, 2023 at 02:51 PM



“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 03, 2022 at 12:52 PM



Will be noting his passing in the Family books that I have. Thanks for sharing the memories of another Great Ball member.

Nora Mae Ball - May 24, 2022 at 05:25 AM

BW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 03, 2022 at 12:43 PM

NB

So sorry for the family's loss. Your distance Cousin Nora Mae Ball Smith granddaughter of Kenneth A Ball late of Seattle.

Nora Mae Ball - May 24, 2022 at 05:13 AM

BW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 03, 2022 at 12:39 PM

BW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 01:53 PM

BW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 01:52 PM

BW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 01:52 PM

BW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 01:30 PM

BW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 01:22 PM

BW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 01:20 PM

BW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 01:13 PM

BW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 01:08 PM

MA

Love that picture of Mom and your Dad at Amanda's Wedding 🥰he will be missed by many people ❤️❤️

Maryjane - May 02, 2022 at 06:12 PM

BW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 12:59 PM

BW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 12:57 PM

BW

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky (Ball) Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 12:54 PM

BW

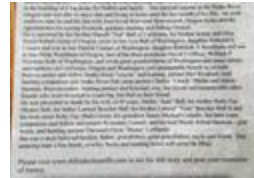
“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Becky Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 12:51 PM

BW

“ 4 files added to the tribute wall



Becky Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 12:49 PM

JD

“ Jim was a person in my life that I will never forget. I think all my memories with Jim are good ones but there is some that will be missed the most. I would stop by Jim's house on the way home from work often to fix broken stuff, hang out, shoot the bs and have a beer with my buddy. I always new Jim broke something or just needed a little help when he wolud call and say "I got a beer with your name on it". Sometimes on hot days I would call Jim and say I'm on way and so many times he would be sitting under the shade tree with a fresh ice cold cooler ready to be served like a real good friend would. I Can't tell you how much I enjoyed that time in my life with Jim. I will forever miss my friend and second grandpa..
Jim Ball R.I.P your friend Jayson.

Jayson Dougherty - April 26, 2022 at 09:18 PM

BW

I love this. Thank you Jayson.

Becky Washburn - May 02, 2022 at 12:46 PM