



Jesse & Cecile Lazenby – Second Love, Sweet and Enduring

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After losing their first loves, Jesse and Cecile Lazenby were doing God’s work when they found love again. Second love – how sweet it is.

Jesse was born in the Harmony community at home in 1921. They lived in Doucette until the mill shut down in ‘29, and then they moved west of Woodville about three miles to live with his grandfather. The move took four hours one way in a horse-drawn wagon.

Jesse’ family farmed and sharecropped, and his father built their first home in 1934.

“Most memories I like to fall back upon are of my Uncle William Prescott who could tell one story after another. I loved him.” There were many stories.

Jesse worked for the Civil Conservation Corp in 1940, a government program to work single men, six months at a time, run like the military.

At 19, he was too young to marry, but his first love, Esther Cheek, had a friend at the courthouse that got them a license “no questions asked.” She was a good Cajun cook. When their first son was born, Esther stayed three days at Dr. Watt Barkley’s hospital. The ambulance ride home cost three dollars.

Married, Jesse could no longer re-enlist at the CCC, so Esther’s Uncle Lee Vaughn got him a job at the Texaco refinery in Port Arthur.

“We lived in Port Arthur from 1940-45, and for five years I rode a bicycle to work. Once, when off work, I took the wife for a ride on the handle bars. The bicycle came apart. Down we went.”

Jesse helped his father-in-law Earl Cheek run the dairy for four years, till Land of Pines started delivering in Tyler County.

“We sold milk for 50 cents a half gallon, so the Land of Pines sold for 25 cents. That put us out of business. Then Land of Pines raised their price to 75 cents.”

They moved to Fort Worth so Jesse could work at a Buley’s Best flour mill. For two years he took correspondence courses on diesel mechanics, which led him to Houston and 20-plus years working on diesels.



Jesse retired back home in Woodville and returned to the United Methodist Church.

He worked another 15 years for the forest service.

“I’ve been a Methodist since 1940,” Jesse proudly relates. “It’s been a special part of my life.” He grew up a Baptist, but his first wife was Methodist.

Cecile chimed in, as she does, ready to energetically help, “All the Lazenby’s back three generations were Methodists. Oh yeah. It was his life.”

Jesse and Esther and the Parish family formed the Highlands Quartet and sang all over East Texas, and made the circuit with the Convention Singers for four years.

Esther donated her “mirror” piano to the Old Cherokee Church in the Cherokee Dies Community. Surprise – when they visited the Heritage Village to see its “Whispers in the Wind” play, low and behold, the restored church still had her piano there.

Jesse has been a Mason since 1954, serving as master of his lodge and district deputy for the Grand Lodge of Texas. He joined the Order of the Eastern Star in 1955 and flourished there, presiding over the initiation of 100+ Stars, holding the top post in the Woodville chapter six times as well as in other chapters. Both organizations forward good character under God with rich symbolism (GrandLodgeofTexas.org and EasternStar.org).

Jesse was president of the Gleaners Class at Woodville’s United Methodist Church when Esther died. They stopped at Kenner’s Grocery almost every week, and Jesse will never forget John Kenner.

“The day Esther died,” Jesse struggled to say, a tear coming and a choke in his voice, “John boxed up two whole chickens. I hated to see that fire down there.”

Cecile’s husband died, too, after a long sickness. Jesse asked her to be on a committee in the Gleaners Class. Vernon Irving and other members lost their spouses.

“I would not get rid of her for no price,” Jesse asserted, smiling at her.

They paused a moment.

“My wife had been gone for 10 years,” Jesse said. “I knew I was lonely.”

Cecile quipped, “He was the one who was lonely.” She has that way of chiming in, quickly, not truly interrupting, but quick as lightning. She is a feisty 4’10” and looks directly at you, expecting you to take what she said as the gracious truth it is.

“‘Look at him,’ I would say,” said Cecile in a tone of reflecting back a few years, as if to a former Sunday School class member. “We would have to go and wake him. We have to get him out of there. I got Jesse up and at ‘em,” she nodded. “‘We don’t have to stay at home,’ I’d tell him. That is not what life is about.”

Grinning, Jesse said, “She is kind of the life of the party.”

Cecile answered, “I did not know if that big tall man like that would want a little scrawny girl like me. But he never did drink or smoke. You see, in my family, you brought a six pack whenever you visited. Cajuns drank. Always came with beer. I never did. I wanted to be a part of my family, but I did not like the taste of beer or wine. That is what I liked about Jesse, too.”

So the romance began. Soon the widows and widowers of the Gleaners Class were dining together in Ivanhoe and playing dominos and Yahoo.

Jesse and Cecile started seeing each other and finally determined to marry on the new millennium, 2000. Yet, as they thought about, “Why wait?” came to both of them. They tied the knot in October 1999.

It was a watershed for the Gleaners Sunday School class!

At Jesse and Cecile’s wedding, Vernon and Ruby stood with them. Then in January 2000, they stood with Vernon and Ruby. In March, Betty Hinsley and Gene Pierce tied the knot too.

Yes, it was the “Gleaners” class all right. Second Love could not be better.

They have weathered a lot of storms together.

Earlier in the year, Jesse and Cecile celebrated his 75th Kirby High School reunion, class of 1938, in an exclusive gathering of 50-plus-year graduates.

In the photo, Cecile is wearing the blouse that belonged to her mother, and before long her daughter Susan wants to wear it for a photo too.

On the 300th birthday of John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, they went to England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales for 18 days.

“All of it,” Cecile percolated. “We saw all the places he preached and lived. So many castles and cathedrals. Scotland was the prettiest.”

After Hurricane Rita hit in 2005, they moved into town behind Jesse’s daughter’s (Linda Harman’s) home, who Cecile loves too, saying, “We understand each other.”

No more steps.

At the start of September 2013, Jesse had his hip replaced. This second time around was a little easier.

Cecile held up the old steel joint, which looked like a tie-rod end from a car, with a shiny round end almost the size of a golf ball. “We are going to keep this in the car, and use it to break the windshield if the car launches off the road into a lake or something.”

That would have been funnier, but she said it with her candid seriousness that made one think, yeah, one could use that old knee joint as a hammer. Cecile’s one feisty Cajun.

Together now over a decade, facing the future with God, courage, humor, family and a love for life – Jesse and Cecile consider themselves fortunate to have found their Second Love, sweet and enduring.