



Fern Bess

February 9, 1929 - August 6, 2019

Fern Bess, age 90, of Petit Jean Mountain, Arkansas, passed away Tuesday, August 6, 2019. She was a generous Master Gardener and flower lover that the mountain people know and loved. A transplant from Mississippi, Fern was firmly grounded in the rocky soil of Petit Jean Mountain.

She was born in Meridian, Mississippi on February 9, 1929. Her dad worked for the city and her mother was a homemaker with a large garden. Fern says she learned to love plants at her mother's knee. After high school, Fern went to work in an office in her home town. She was tutoring a mutual friend when she met her husband and love of her life, Bill Bess, as he returned home from the War. They married in 1948 and had three sons, Paul, Jack, and Jimmy. After working in Dallas, TX for nine years, the family bought a farm in Mississippi and moved back to care for her mother. Fern began tutoring students at the Junior College. Bill, aware of her scholarly abilities, registered her for classes. She earned a BS and later a MS in Education from Mississippi State.

Fern's career began when she pursued and obtained teachers training for public schools for the State of Mississippi. She wrote and set up a county wide program for Adult Continuing Education. It was the beginning of an illustrious career in which she traveled from coast to coast teaching workshops for state adult education programs. She and Bill discovered Petit Jean State Park when she traveled to State Teachers College in Conway, Arkansas. It was their 25th wedding anniversary. They fell in love with the mountain and bought their place on Bratcher Road in 1978.

After retirement, Fern began another career of volunteerism and support of the State Park and its employees. She lobbied the Legislature to obtain benefits and pay raises for the Park employees. She and Bill worked along with the park staff to plant trees, azaleas and wildflowers to line the walkways. They helped to place the rocks in front of Mather Lodge. Later they bought the brown van, which she still drove, and traveled all over the country planting wild flowers in many state parks.

After Bill died in 1994, Fern stayed busy. She became an “official” Master Gardner and began providing gifts of wildflower arrangements for Mather Lodge. She decorated the Christmas tree in the lobby and made and placed Christmas wreaths on all the cabin doors. She regularly made and gave beautiful arrangements for community functions and celebrations.

Fern’s accomplishments were not unnoticed at the state level. Governor Mike Huckabee named her “STARkansan” in 1999 for “doing a lot of good for Arkansas without seeking a lot of credit.” He published a wonderful tribute about her volunteerism in his column on the Arkansas web site. In 2001, she was appointed member of the Arkansas Division of Volunteerism Advisory Council.

Through the years, Fern served the Petit Jean Mountain community as president of the PJMCA, held every available office in the Extension Homemakers, worked as commissioner of election polls, and was active in the Senior American Special at the Park for thirty-one years. She was always very dedicated to the PJM Cemetery and its needs.

She and son Paul grow specimen plants, trees, shrubs, and wildflowers on their property, providing food and a refuge for the birds and wild life. The greenhouses are full of various lush, healthy plants including blooming Christmas cactus, bromeliads and ferns.

Fern once said, “the beauty of growing flowers is in the sharing with others.” Those who knew her were often invited to “Come on over, you heifer, I have some cuttings for you that will grow in your yard.

She is survived by her sons, Paul Lynn Bess of Petit Jean and Jack Allen Bess of West Coast; granddaughter, Paula Lynn Bess of Rhoda Island; and great granddaughters, Ella and Cassidy.

Graveside services will be 10:00 a.m. Monday, August 12, at the Petit Jean Cemetery with Bro. Bill Scroggs officiating.

Cemetery

Petit Jean Mountain Cemetery

55 Trinity Loop

Morrilton, AR, 72110

Events

AUG **Graveside Service** 10:00AM

12

Petit Jean Mountain Cemetery

55 Trinity Loop, Morrilton, AR, US, 72110

Comments



“ When I remember Fern, I think of her as smiling. And surrounded by flowers.

Rachel Engebrecht - August 12, 2019 at 04:53 PM



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Rachel Engebrecht - August 12, 2019 at 04:51 PM



“ Bless you, Fern. The sweet shrub and winter honeysuckle you gave us constantly remind us of you, and our roadways and rights of way will bear witness to your work for years to come. The heavenly gardens are no doubt getting an upgrade right now.

Don Higgins - August 12, 2019 at 09:25 AM



“ I was truly blessed when this very uniquely incredible woman came into my life! We ventured into a ‘mell of a hess’ that connected us for her last 19.5 years of her life. She never missed a beat, was always there for you-day or night, and always with a smile ! I took her at her word one time calling her in the middle of the wee morning hours; she never let me live it down, but it was always in the absolute best humor! She had such a love for all living things; and always found a way to make each and every one matter! No doubt her love for flowers flowed into her every day life, and she brought those flowers into so many peoples lives bringing life and smiles with all that she shared. She had a love AND respect for all living things. Mentored countless people, volunteered countless hours, and always ready to assist others, especially the greater the need-if they had no one else to rely on! She always tried to make life better for others, not stopping with her human friend’s, but all of her critters and the many critters she encountered that weren’t hers. Though, I’ve addressed her as a woman, she was also a lady. She was so dignified, and had her rough edges, as she loved to call out the ‘heifers’, be boldly blunt, and yet, she was truly an angel on earth! I know she was blessed with many more than just one set of wings in this life. She is truly the most unique woman I’ve ever met. I’m blessed to have shared the time that we had, and wouldn’t trade it for the world . Though this is a sad day to realize the earthly loss, I know heaven is rejoicing as they have gained another angel with decorated wings! Well earned Fern! Rejoice in your new life! Until the day I pray we can meet again. Love you

Monica Songer, friend - August 11, 2019 at 02:22 PM



“ “Miss Fern”
Back when my mother, Olive Fenton, had Petit Jean Country Store, she and Miss Fern were good friends. We three daughters loved her like a bonus family member. She would bring flowers in to the store and stay and visit a bit. She was always cheerful and full of plans. Those plans usually included helping someone. We liked going to her house because in the back yard would come running dozens of feral cats. She fed them and talked to them. And since we’re all cat people, that was fun to see and hear.
This earth will miss Miss Fern.

Dianne Fenton Taylor - August 09, 2019 at 01:42 PM



“ The first time I met Fern, I felt an instant connection to her. I think most people who met her felt that. She had a way of making you feel that you mattered to her. I remember I was wearing a long, flowing skirt that she said was, "sassy". She told me a little bit about how she met her husband and the dress she was wearing then. The last time I got to visit with her was in her yard, with my mom, surrounded by her overflowing garden. We talked about the our lives, the plants, the birds, and the hummingbirds. She expressed concern about the crop spraying and its impact on nature. She understood the interconnection of living things. Her presence made me smile. Her memory still does and always will.

Debbie Jones - August 08, 2019 at 12:03 PM



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Phyllis Taylor - August 08, 2019 at 09:43 AM



“ Fern didn't just give herself to our community, she helped the veterans as well. When her husband was ill at Ft. Roots some years ago, she saw how some of the other veterans there were in need, so she would take them some tastier meals than they were used to receiving, and sometimes take them places just so they could have an outing. That is the way she was, always thinking of others.

Phyllis Taylor

Phyllis Taylor - August 08, 2019 at 09:21 AM



“ Charlene Allcorn lit a candle in memory of Fern Bess



Charlene Allcorn - August 07, 2019 at 07:20 PM



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Gina Sellers - August 07, 2019 at 05:30 PM



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Gina Sellers - August 07, 2019 at 05:27 PM