

In Memory of Estelle Counts

A Eulogy Written for Her Funeral

By Pat Edwards

It never occurred to me that Stell Counts would ever die. Knowing Stell, loving Stell, I just assumed that she would always be there. She emitted such feisty energy, such excitement for new things, and such love for her family and community that I could not imagine her any other way. And, you know what? I believe that I was right! Stell may have left her body, but in her heaven, she is still with us.

I am currently reading a book called *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold about a 14-year old girl who narrates the story as she looks down from heaven after her premature death. In the book, she describes her heaven as being anything she wants it to be... that heaven is different for each person. The girl chooses to spend her time in heaven observing her family and friends and the manner in which they deal with her death. For Stell, I know her heaven is similar, for I don't think she would have wanted to live anywhere else in any other way than she actually did and the people in her family and community will always remain the most important to her.

Jim and I feel an especially deep loss, the loss of not being able to see that wonderful lady coming into the store or attending a school function. She has had such a profound impact on our lives over the past 30 years that we will continue to look for her each day. Even though we made some drastic changes when we converted the Mitchell Store into the Lorane Family Store, she was always a vocal supporter. When Jim said that he was going to have to tear down the old store (which was gradually falling into the creek) and build a new store, her excitement and encouragement accompanied him every step of the way. When friends and acquaintances would reminisce about the old store and how different it was "back then," she would admonish them that "Jim has his own way of doing things and is doing a wonderful job!" When the family sold the family homes across from the store and the buyer defaulted, she would not hear of putting them back on the market. She wanted Jim to buy them and despite my hesitancy to take on rentals, she insisted that no one but Jim should have them. Between the two of them, I was railroaded into signing the contract even though I kicked and

screamed all of the way.

When Nancy, Marna, and I conceived of writing the history of the Lorane area, it was Stell and Lloyd that we turned to. They knew all of the "old timers" and it was their shared confidence in us that allowed us to pre-sell enough of our books to pay for the first printing. Stell dug deep into her memory and her treasure trove of pictures and supplied us with information and leads to track down the early families of the area. When we found pictures in which people were not identified, Stell took on the project of finding out who they were. When we began planning the 1987 Lorane Centennial celebration, Stell and Lloyd were active participants and the excitement that she generated kept us all on track and helped to keep at bay any discouragement we felt in the huge task of planning.

In recent years, as her health began to fail and she was no longer able to drive, she spent more time at home but that didn't stop her from continuing to impact the lives of those around her. Kids, including our own grandchildren from the Lorane Elementary School, frequently stopped by her house to visit with Stell on their way home from school. She always had a cookie or a snack for them and they loved to sit with her and visit for awhile before continuing on home. She was ageless to them and helped to bridge the proverbial gap between youth and the elderly that many of us fail to even attempt.

If Lorane was a bigger community, we would be naming a building or a special project after her – "The Estelle Counts Community Center" or "The Estelle Counts Memorial," – but we are a small community and since most of us here knew and loved her, our memorial to her should be to not let her energy or love of community die. If each one of us vows to get involved in preserving the links between the past, present, and the future of Lorane, it will evolve as Stell would have wanted, but it will also remain a community where we can all feel we belong. And, for each positive involvement, you can be sure that Stell will be smiling from her heaven.

So, if you're watching us now, Stell, "God Bless You! You did it your way, and that's the most any of us can ever hope for!"