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Dr. Ira E. Bell Jr.

Jan. 19, 1921 - July 17, 2014

Dr. Ira E. Bell Jr., formerly of Hickory, died July 17, 2014, at age 93, after a long, good life. Born January 18, 1921, Ira was the oldest child of Ira Eugene and Fenida Nelms Bell of Elbert Co., GA. He was preceded in death by his parents, brothers Wilton and Nelms, and sister Norma Bell Irvin.

Born and raised on the family cotton farm, Ira enjoyed a simple boyhood in the fields and nearby creeks. At seventeen he left home for Western Kentucky State Teachers College at Bowling Green. Afterwards, motivated in part by the loss of his childhood friend Clovis Dixon, he attended the University of Georgia Medical School in Augusta, graduating in 1945. He interned at St. Vincent's Hospital in Jacksonville, Florida and soon joined the US Army Medical Corp, rising to the rank of captain. Afterwards Ira did his residency at Duke University and was appointed Chief Resident in radiology. There he met a newly-arrived nurse, Josephine Anderson of Holbrook, MA and they married in 1949.

In the same year Ira accepted an invitation to join the radiology practice of Dr. Luther

Oehlbeck in Morganton. The partnership soon moved to Hickory and, following Oehlbeck's retirement, Ira established Catawba Radiological Associates and practiced with partners including Drs. Hal Owlsley, Bill Brooks and Parks Booker. During his career Ira was elected Chief of Staff at the Frye and Catawba Memorial Hospitals. He had a faculty appointment at Wake Forest University Medical School, was an early supporter and professor in the Catawba County AHEC system, and served as President of the NC Chapter of the American College of Radiology. His practice grew steadily along with the community.

In 1972, responding to the increasing need for cancer treatment, Ira relocated the family to Boston, MA while he trained in radiation therapy and radiation oncology, and served on the faculty at Tufts New England Medical Center. Returning to Hickory, Ira founded the radiation oncology program at Catawba Valley Memorial Hospital where he treated thousands of patients in the following years.

Ira and Jo contentedly raised their four children, with the devoted assistance of Ms. Barbara Wilson, at 508 Sixth Street NW and were faithfully involved in the First United Methodist Church, including Sunday school, youth fellowship and many wonderful summer camps. Ira was active in the Kiwanis Club, served on the Catawba Technical Community College board, and later helped found the Catawba Medical Foundation to support the facilities, programs and services of the Catawba Valley Medical Center. When time allowed Ira took pleasure in the out-of-doors, including canoeing Lake Hickory, car camping, or simply hiking and identifying trees along trails on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Amicably divorced in 1985, Ira then retired from medical practice and established Bell Financial Planners with colleagues Frank Bolick and Diane Critcher Rhoney. Ira and his family were especially blessed when he met Margaret Sarah Graham of Iowa City, IA. After marrying in 1990 they enjoyed their retirement, traveling domestically and abroad, and visiting their families. In time they made their home at Grace Ridge Retirement Community in Morganton.

Ira is survived by his son Ira, III (Chip) and wife Susie of Asheville, granddaughters Erica and Adrienne (Isaac Savage) and great granddaughter Isabelle; his son Tom of Hickory and granddaughters Savannah and Taylor, and Ashley Collins (Desmond Bennett) and great granddaughter Emma; his son John and wife Judy Whisnant of

Chapel Hill, and grandchildren Nathan and Lucy; his cherished daughter Laura Bell Smith of Richmond, VA; his former wife Jo Bell of Chapel Hill; his brother-in-law Howlett Irvin of Alpharetta, GA and sister-in-law Doris Bell of Athens, GA and their families; his step-children Nan Pacha (Gary), Peg Graham (Jim Marshall), and Bob Graham (Peggy) and their families; and many friends and grateful patients.

A simple service will be held at 1:00 pm Saturday July 26, 2014 in the chapel at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Hickory. Ira's ashes will be returned to the north Georgia red clay, alongside his grandparents, parents, brothers and sister in the family burial plot at the historic Bethlehem United Methodist Church in Middleton, GA. The gifts he shared with us of character, work and life will continue being nurtured in his family and friends, and shared going forward.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the American Cancer Society, the Alzheimer's Association, or the charity of your choice. Condolences to Bell Family, PO Box 404, Hickory, NC 28603.

Sossoman Funeral Home and Crematory Center is assisting the family with the arrangements.

Tribute Wall

No tributes added yet.