Local woman celebrates 105th birthday

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Jack Dobbs September 8, 2025



Reba Bush, 105, holds caregiver Brettni Butts, 32, face as Bush gives her a kiss at her daughter's home where she lives in Bowling Green, Ky. on Friday, September 5, 2025. (Gabi Broekema for The Daily News)

In 1920, the median income in the United States was $3,269.40. The world was recovering from the fog of the first World War, and milk cost an average of 60 cents per gallon.

1920 was also the year Reba Bush was born. This past Tuesday, Bush celebrated her 105th birthday with an event attended in northern Simpson County by an estimated 200 people.

A retired elementary school teacher, Bush taught school for over three decades, most of it spent teaching third grade in Simpson County. Today, she lives in Warren County with her daughter Becky Gentry. Speaking on what it has meant having her around to this day, Thomas said, "it's just a blessing."

“Her grandchildren visit often, great-grandchildren visit at least once a week,” Gentry said. “It’s not unlikely for me to have eight, 10, 12 people a day in this house.”

Bush was born on Sept. 2, 1920, in Allen County. An only child, Bush grew up on a farm, in her words, “with the chickens and the cows and the horses.”

In 1929, the U.S. stock market took a nosedive, leading to a period of widespread poverty and unemployment that came to be known as the Great Depression. For Bush though, it was hard to tell that anything had happened.

“We killed our own meat … and I milked cows,” she said. “It was good … growing up.”

At the age of 5, Bush started attending school. She said after she finished grade school, she had to take a test to get into high school. Bush said when it came time to take the test, she was the only student in her grade.

“I barely passed it,” she said. ” … I’d never taken a test in my life.”

She passed, and went to high school in a small town south of Scottsville named Petroleum, she said. Her last semester of high school though was spent in Franklin, where she lived during the week with her mother’s great-aunt and was taken back to Allen County by her parents during the weekend.

Eventually, she obtained her teaching certificate from the Western Kentucky State Teachers College, now Western Kentucky University. She got married to her husband Wilton in 1940, and started teaching in 1941 in a small Barren County community called Tracy.

“I started teaching all eight grades,” she said, adding that her students at that time all came from “good homes. In this big room, we had a big coal stove. All I had to do was say, ‘would you get a bucket of coal please,’ and they’d run and get the bucket.”

Bush’s husband was a high school teacher, but left to fight in World War II in 1943. By the time he returned from the war, his teaching spot had been lost.

Eventually, two positions opened up in Simpson County. One was a principal position at a school in the community of Middleton, the other was a third grade teaching position.

Altogether, Bush spend more than three decades teaching students around the area before retiring in 1979. Her husband followed suit in 1980.

Over the years, Bush has had five children, 10 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren and now has one great-great grandchild. The years have not been without their hardship though. Her husband passed in 2001 after 60 years of marriage and one of her five children died in 2006.

Even so, she has a positive outlook on the past 105 years.

“Life is really short, (but) life is wonderful,” she said. “God made the world, and it’s absolutely wonderful, and I just thank Him every day.”



Becky Gentry, 82, points to the rows of family pictures her 105 year old mother Reba Bush keeps hung in her room in Becky’s home in Bowling Green, Ky. on Friday, September 5, 2025. (Gabi Broekema for The Daily News)



Jack covers city government for the Daily News. Originally from Simpson County, he attended Western Kentucky University and graduated in 2022 with a degree in journalism.

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