

## ***Nellie Hunter***

### **Love and prayers from Aunt Nellie**

Nellie Hunter knows what is truly valuable. It isn't about money or objects we accumulate in our lives. It is the people we love and our faith in God. She is rich in those regards. "At least half the town (of Tupelo) knows me, and most of those call me mom, granny or Aunt Nellie," she laughed. "The preacher at our church even calls me 'Mother'." Nellie said the preacher asked permission to call her "Mother" because she reminds him of his own mother. "I am a little older than him," she said. "We have a small church, and I don't mind him calling me that. I consider it a term of affection."

She has raised several generations in her small home. "I had seven kids and adopted one more," said Nellie. "I have had some of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren here to live, too." Currently, a granddaughter and grandson and three great-grandchildren live with Nellie. "I love babies," she said. "I love to hold babies and cuddle." In early 2021 she had surgery and complications that followed made it difficult to hold and cuddle the little ones. "I missed that!"

Nellie has a philosophy that no matter what, children need a life filled with stability and love and someone showing them they care. Nellie has offered that for the children in her household and would stand up for them when needed, making sure they got an education, and making sure they went to church.

"My mother died when I was born. I was a twin, and my twin brother and I were sent with my aunt to California. I had five brothers and one sister who stayed in Oklahoma with my father. I grew up using the name Nellie Buffington. When I joined the Army, I had to sign up under the name on my birth certificate – Nellie Miller. It was hard to get used to. They would yell 'Miller!' I would look around, wondering who they were yelling at, then realize it was me!" She was in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) from 1957-1960.

Two of those years were served in Okinawa for the Four Commanders Headquarters (Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines) She also attended Adjutant General School in Indiana. She worked with all four branches of military, serving the Generals, while serving overseas. Her rank was E5 – Specialist 5<sup>th</sup> Class.

"There were only three employees at the Headquarters in Okinawa," said Nellie. "A Colonel, a Sergeant, and myself." She smiled. "When I got out of the service, I started raising a family, and I am still raising a family!"

Nellie said, "After I was discharged, a cousin obtained my daddy's address and I came to Oklahoma on a bus. Daddy and my brothers and sister were all at the bus station waiting to meet me. That was the first time I had seen them. I had known about them, but had never met them."

She stayed a couple of weeks, then went back to California. She married and raised a family. Nellie moved to Oklahoma in 1979 and worked at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Oklahoma City in the purchasing-contracting department. She retired as the Chief of that department. In 1993 she moved to Tupelo.

She and her sister built a closer relationship once they lived in the same state. "Now we live close and are both single. We have worked together at both the Coalgate and Tupelo Community Centers," said Nellie.

"I told my kids when they were teenagers I wanted them at home. They didn't seem to mind being home, and simply brought their friends home with them. I would get up and the house would be covered up in kids on pallets all over the floor."

Nellie laughed and said someone once described her as a little banty hen. "They said I always wanted everyone under my wings. Maybe that is true."

She said one thing she really enjoyed doing as a volunteer for veterans was serving on the Choctaw Veterans Association with founder Richard Adams, who is now deceased. "The two of us went to Camp Mabry in Austin, Texas to celebrate the Code Talkers Honor Ceremony and we also worked on getting the cemetery at the Choctaw Capitol for veterans." She said her twin brother and she were going to be buried at the Choctaw Veterans Cemetery. "My brother was Joe Dewey Miller, and he was cremated in 2006. I have kept his ashes. I want us to be buried together - we came to earth together and I want to be buried in the same grave. He was an Army Veteran."

Nellie said she loves to read, and is active at her church, the Centrahoma Baptist Church. "I am the Secretary at church and I once tended the nursery, although we have no kids there now." She said there are only about ten members at this time.

When asked how she would like to be remembered, Nellie said, "Being loveable, sharing my home and faith with people. If more people would, I don't think this world would be in the shape it is in."

What were the most important lessons Nellie has learned in her life? "People aren't always what you think they are! In order to understand them, you have to care about them in the first place!"

She said, "When I was in the military, I should have stayed longer. I wish I would have stayed longer. Being a woman, I was very proud of my time there. I am a Choctaw Color Guard member and I am proud of my time being an active Choctaw Guard.

"We are lucky to be in a free land. I was in the military during a glamorous time to be there. I am proud to be able to have served and proud to be able to work in the Church and in the Choctaw Nation camps and serve in the Color Guard.

"Now the Choctaw Nation is helping elders with a \$200 monthly grocery voucher. There have been times when I can remember \$50 stood between my family going hungry. I appreciate what elders are getting. The Choctaw Nation has made a tremendous impact on my life.

"I have always felt humble. I could not believe when I was selected as 'Woman Elder of the Year'. I still say 'why me?'"

Nellie said, "I do have some advice for young people. Go to church, get right with God. Get an education – you can get help through the Choctaws. I went back to college when I was 75 years old and the Choctaws helped me!"

Does she have any other messages? Yes! "Love and Prayers – from Aunt Nellie!"

Cut line:

Nellie Hunter lives the Faith, Family and Culture values of the Choctaw Nation.

Photo by Judy Allen.

