

## ***Sylvester and Teddi Moore***

### **Roots in southeast Oklahoma**

"I was born in Weathers, Oklahoma, a little place in Pittsburg County just above Sardis Lake. A long time ago, they had a big rock school. There was no town or anything, just a place. We had a little church called Sardis Church," said Sylvester Moore.

"Christine Baker is over the church now. Not many go there - 10 or 15 people. One big thing about living at Weathers is the only place that had a well with good, clean water was that church. We had to walk over there to get water. We walked half a mile to get water from the well, and carried water back home."

Sylvester grinned, "Down below the church was a big pond that had tame geese on it. Mama would tell me, 'Don't go down there. You will get your shoes muddy.' Well, sure enough, I would go and get my shoes muddy. She would carry a rag to wipe my shoes off. We lived there at that town above Sardis until Dad got a job at the Ammunition Depot and then we moved to town. That was about '40. I was probably 8 or 9 years old. The town we moved to was Hartshorne. That was the first time we had electricity. We had electric lights instead of kerosene lanterns. We still didn't have an indoor bathroom, but lights were a big deal."

When he and siblings were children, Sylvester said Christmas morning was looked forward to with excitement. "We expected to see packages under the tree. We could look at them when we got up but couldn't open them right away."

Sylvester said, "I lived in Hartshorne until 1947. My parents sent me to Lawrence, Kansas to go to school at Haskell. I was 16 when they put me on a bus. I was the oldest child by five years to three brothers and three sisters.

"I was okay by myself. I had known responsibility. I had walked that half mile by myself to haul water from that church when I was five years old." Sylvester had also walked a mile by himself to go to school when he was about five. Sylvester made it to school okay most days – the only time he had trouble was when there was a big bull in the road that wouldn't move. He just turned around and went back home to his grandfather, Charlie Anderson, who took him fishing instead.

Sylvester had a chore of helping his dad with the goats when he was only 4 or 5 years old. "One of the goats was named Bert. I played with the goats and even rode them. I would take a string and make a bridle, but they would chew through the string! It was always fun to play with them. I had to take the goats to the creek to water them. There was a large log laying from the bank into the creek. The goats would walk out on the log to get a drink. One of them was mean, so I would wait for him to get on the log, then I would push him off in the creek!" Sylvester said with a mischievous laugh.

After high school, Sylvester was in the Army during the Korean War. He spent 16 months in Europe, spending his time in France. He was grateful not to have been sent to Korea.

Work was difficult to find at first after being discharged. There was supposed to be jobs in Houston, so he went there, but the Suez Crisis meant the oil refineries stopped hiring. The Armco Steel Corporation found a place for Sylvester and he remained there 27 years. He also found a wife while in Texas, Helen Taylor. Helen passed in 1999 after more than 40 years of marriage.

Armco disbanded their Houston office in the mid-80's, offering Sylvester an out-of-state opportunity, but he chose early retirement, moving home to Oklahoma with Helen to build a dream cabin in the mountains of Honobia.

After a couple of years, Sylvester got acquainted with then-councilman Randle Durant and went to work at the Choctaw Nation boarding school Jones Academy, helping students with activities and livestock shows. He continued doing this until 1995. "We didn't get (financial) help from the tribe so we went to the feed stores for (sponsorships) the first few years. Then the Choctaw Nation decided they were going to have a big swine show," said Sylvester.

"It got better after sponsorship money came in and we improved as a group. We got higher-quality hogs and fed them better and the kids learned to take care of them better."

Sylvester has been very involved in church. When he first moved back to Oklahoma and he lived on the mountain, they started going to church at Clayton, the Lighthouse. When they moved to Talihina in 1989, he started attending Faith Pentecostal. "Former Councilman Kenny Bryant was the pastor," said Sylvester. "We still go there. I am a board member there, which means to help run the church."

Sylvester was one of the first IRB (Internal Review Board) members at Talihina for the tribe and served until early in 2019. He is on the Governing Board of the Choctaw Nation Health Board and is also on the Kiamichi Housing Authority Board. He has been the Elder of the Year at Talihina for the Choctaw Nation Community Center.

Sylvester served 17 years as the Sergeant-at-Arms for the Choctaw Nation Tribal Council. He said being Sergeant-at-Arms was an honor and an exciting position.

He is now married to Teddi Irwin. They wed in 2016. "Sylvester is one of the kindest and is the most respected person I know," she said. "Sylvester is known for his honesty."

Sylvester has a hobby of gardening. When he was only five, he discovered a love of gardening. "I was little and watched my mom garden and she let me make a little garden of my own. At first, it was just a play garden, and I grew a little bit of stuff. Then I made a bigger garden, and then next year, it got bigger, then kept getting bigger, then eventually was a real garden! I liked it because that's what they did!"

Now he has a butterfly way-station in his yard so that butterflies and other pollinators can breed and survive.

He and Teddi are very active at the Senior Center. They love to travel and enjoy singing Choctaw hymns.

They went on a mid-Atlantic singing trip with the Choctaw and Friends group a few years ago that included stops at the Smithsonian NMAI, Statue of Liberty, Cherokee Fair, Old Salem, N.C., and the Carlisle School where they sang for Olympian Billy Mills.

Sylvester laughed when talking about the adventures they had on their singing tour, "When we were in Washington, D.C. at the Smithsonian, there was no place to park. They found out we were there, pushed a button and the big columns out front went down and they let us drive right on the sidewalk and park!"

Sylvester and Teddi are also involved in local community projects such as painting colorful blocks for a tourism-related Quilt Trail. "All fifty states have barn quilt trails," said Teddi. "We dropped 'barn' out of the name and went with Southeastern Oklahoma Quilt Trails, then people from other counties began contacting us so we changed the name to Eastern Oklahoma Quilt Trails. We now encompass 33 Counties. We have a website and a brochure. We are self-funded."

During the pandemic, to teach others to paint the quilt blocks, social distancing is maintained by having demonstrations in booths at outdoor festivals and having people watch from six-feet away. People who want to become involved in painting a quilt block for the tourism trail are provided with the needed supplies. They are also provided with the board, already drawn with the quilt pattern. "They simply need to fill in the blanks," said Teddi. "We put our first block up September of 2020 and now have 42 blocks up."

Teddi is proud of her Choctaw heritage – she is a descendant of Apuckshunnubee. A great-great-grandfather, Joel Everidge, was a Supreme Court Justice for the tribe for 20 years. "My grandmother was Josie Everidge," said Teddi. Both Sylvester and Teddi enjoy researching genealogy. Teddi found that her father's grandmother's great-grandfather was Hopia Iskitina (Little Leader) and had given his granddaughter his buffalo horn spoon when she left Mississippi. The family settled in the Ti Valley area, about fifteen miles from where Sylvester was raised. Sylvester's genealogy includes his grandmother, Jincy Clay Anderson, a sister to Andrew Clay, who is a great-grandfather to Chief Batton.

While proud of her history, Teddi is most proud of the life she and Sylvester have made for themselves together. Sylvester and Teddi have an easy recipe for a good life: they do what they enjoy. Their smile and laughter make the world feel welcome.

Cutline:

Sylvester and Teddi Moore enjoy life and love to share their happiness with others. Wisdom Sylvester would like to share is "ENJOY WHATEVER YOU DO!"

Photo by Judy Allen.

Cutline:

Sylvester and Teddi show some of the painted quilt blocks that are ready to place along the Eastern Oklahoma Quilt Trail.

Photo by Judy Allen.

Transcript Notes from recording Feb 24, 2020

Military: I went to school for auto mechanics. I was a MOS 1014. When they sent me to France and they said they didn't need any auto mechanics over here – we have auto mechanics to take care of our things, so we have to find you another job to do. There was a quartermaster of warehouses that were ¼ mile long – about ten of them. They asked if I thought I could run one of the overhead cranes. They learned me how and that is what I did. Trucks would go down to the ocean and pick up cargo off the ship. They would bring it there, we would unload them and they would go back and get more. On the other end, we would load the trucks out with supplies needed in Germany for schooling for fighting people. They were in Bivouac year 'round. They were learning them how to fight.

That is how I ended up as a crane operator When I got out of service I came back to Hartshorne and I couldn't find work around there so a guy told me to go down to Houston and get a job in a oil refinery. He said then every part of the money I saved, they would match. The guy said after 25 years I could be well off. I left Hartshorne and went to Houston. I went to Oil refineries and they said weren't hiring. Suez crisis was going on. They were laying off. So there I was. Couldn't get a job. I went to Sheffield's? and tried to get job. Showed DD214 to prove done service job. Saw I was a crane operator and hired me to run overhead crane. All my schooling for auto mechanic didn't do any good.

Sylvester-

Only registered Indian (on discharge and graduation papers)' 64 and '65 came up with civil rights and all big companies because of discrimination.

They had two lines - labor line and operator line. Labor line was mostly colored people. They hired me as an operator. They had to do away with that. They had to interview everyone. When they interviewed me, they said I was the only Indian they had working. There were some boys from Hartshorne, but they evidently didn't show their papers and must have put "W" on nationality.

Teddi – my GGGf was Apuckshunnubbe and we were always proud.

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