

# Elders in Our Lives

**Matt Jurmu**

Who are our elders? They are those to whom God has given many years in this life. Aging into elderhood is part of human life. Perhaps the elder often doesn't even realize he or she fits to that role until someone reminds him or her of it!

Elders play a large role in our lives – at home, in society and in God's kingdom. From my early memories, elders were a part of my life. They reminded us of days gone past, taught from their life's experiences but most importantly, they taught us of Jesus.

God has given elders the gift to teach and instruct on matters of faith and life. Through their experiences, they uplift and encourage us. I remember occasions when a dear older one reached out in concern and cared for me, and I am forever grateful.

Familiar words from a song of Zion remind us of this: "Thank You for our homes and families; thanks for all who share our lives; through our elders, sisters, brothers, many blessings You provide" (351:2).

## **Elders Are Teachers**

God gives wisdom according to His measure. In addition, by virtue of living many days, elders gain insight to teach us through their experiences. We are reminded in Deuteronomy 32:7: "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee."

When asked by God to teach, Moses had doubts and he spoke of this to God: "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken: but I am slow of speech, and slow of tongue" (Exod. 4:10).

In the next verses, God instructs: "Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say."

Dear elder, God has reminded that even though you may feel lacking, He has given you the gift to instruct and to share.

## **Honor and Remember the Elders**

As God's commandment says, we should honor our father and our mother. This means that we've also been given the duty to honor and respect our elders. "For God commanded, saying, Honour the father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death" (Matt. 15:4). Jesus instructs us

in such a way that we are to give our complete and full respect to all elders. This should happen no matter our age or place in life.

A small group of us would travel around our city every holiday season and sing those glad tidings of Christmas at the doorsteps of those who were limited in their ability to travel. We sometimes hesitated to ring the doorbell, but once we did and the door was opened, we were welcomed with open arms. Our small group was overjoyed to help share in the joy of Christmas – it brought joy both to the elder and the visitor! Through the visits and singing, we were again uplifted, encouraged and thankful.

The psalm writer reminds: “Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth” (Ps. 71:9). Let us remember our elders in prayer that they could live the days God gives them to the fullest, and that one day they may gain that victory we all long for.

## Escorts in Faith

### **Steve and Patty Haataja**

Lorraine Hillukka (née Ylioja, formerly Halonen) has led a busy and active life, caring for children, stepchildren and grandchildren for over 50 years. Through life’s sorrows and joys, she gives thanks to God for her faith and her believing escorts.

Born in Saskatchewan, Canada, Lorraine was the oldest of eleven siblings. Sorrow entered her life early; she lost a baby sister to whooping cough and a brother in a house fire.

In May 1955, Lorraine traveled to Minnesota, where she met Paul Halonen. That fall, Paul went to Canada to help with harvesting at Lorraine’s family farm. Paul and Lorraine were married September 3, 1955.

An attorney in Outlook advised them they could take care of the immigration paperwork when they arrived at the border; however, that wasn’t the case. They were directed instead to the Consulate in Winnipeg to begin the necessary paperwork. Likely there weren’t so many international marriages at the time, and they didn’t know what to expect.

Lorraine returned home to the family farm for two months, then rode by train to Minneapolis to finally be reunited with her husband.

In 1965, on their way to a Sunday school picnic in Cokato, Paul and Lorraine and their five children were in a tragic car accident. Paul did not survive his injuries, and Lorraine was left to raise their five young children. Praying for help, Lorraine was grateful for the support of the Minneapolis congregation, where young and old willingly assisted.

A young widow, Lorraine started sewing as a means to support her young family. She attended Dunwoody Institute in Minneapolis, learning the craft of tailoring and drapery. In the 1970s, while living in Cokato, she also attended nursing school in Minneapolis to become an LPN.

Lorraine says she always felt the presence of her believing escorts, who helped her and her family on their journey of faith.

In 1986, after being widowed for 21 years, Lorraine married Ray Hillukka. Ray had lost his wife Dorothy in childbirth and was left with a large family. Lorraine moved to the Hillukka farm near Wolf Lake, Minn. with Ray and his children. Accepting and trusting in God, Ray and Lorraine also raised four of Lorraine's grandchildren.

Lorraine's husband Ray has now also passed away. Today Lorraine lives in Menahga at a senior apartment complex. Five of the apartments are occupied by believing escorts. They visit often and check in on each other.

Lorraine still enjoys sewing and has sewn a variety of dolls, quilts and stuffed animals for her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She also enjoys cooking and baking for them. With a smile, Lorraine tells that she still has car seats in her car for her great-grandchildren.

## Living Faith Has Carried

### **Margie Haataja**

Evelyn Nevala was born in Upper Michigan, on October 16, 1927. She and her siblings rode to school in a covered wagon pulled by horses. The driver spread straw on the floor to help keep their feet warm.

The Copper City School that Evelyn attended had grades 1 to 8 with two grades in each room. She says she didn't have opportunity to go to high school – it was too far away – but she took math, English and history through the mail with the American School program.

Evelyn says that their family was poor and times were hard. They had dairy cows on their farm, and they put the milk into cans and took them to the corner where a milk truck picked them up. They also grew apples and strawberries, which they sold. Evelyn's dad made snowshoes and skis and sold them too.

Evelyn and her family attended church services in Fulton. Since her father never drove a car, they went by horse and wagon. When her older siblings learned to drive, they took the family to church. They also went by car to St. John's Services, the annual summer services in Calumet.

There wasn't Sunday school at church when Evelyn was a child. They studied the catechism at home and sometimes attended Sunday school in homes. In the winter they skied to Sunday school.

When she grew up, Evelyn moved to California where one of her sisters lived. She found a job there and also the love of her life, Peter Nevala. They were married in Nevada in 1950 and later moved to Minnesota.

Evelyn says she always wanted a big family. Their first child Michael was born in 1951, but they didn't have another child for six years. In that time, she had a couple miscarriages.

Evelyn and Peter decided to do foster care so Michael would have children to play with. When they lived in the Minneapolis area, they took in about 10 different children. Their daughter Karen was born there too.

In 1959, the Nevalas moved to a farm near Sebeka and also took in foster children there. One baby they had for over a year and another for five months. They tried to adopt one but were denied. Evelyn says she enjoyed being a mother to their own children and also to the foster children. They were blessed with two more daughters, Mary Ann and Lori, when they lived on the farm.

Peter worked outside of the home, so they didn't do much farming. They raised pigs for a while and one day the barn started on fire from the heat lamp. Only Evelyn and Karen were home. It was a total loss – they lost the pigs too.

Evelyn says the most traumatic thing that happened to her was losing her husband. They had planned to move to Brainerd Elderly Housing in 1997. Peter told her after they made the plans, "I don't think I'm going to make it to Brainerd." And he was right. God called him home to heaven instead.

Evelyn moved to Brainerd alone and stayed one year. However, she missed Menahga, so she bought a small house there and moved back. She had dear friends and relatives in the Menahga area who supported her and helped her. Believing neighbors Reno and Marian Juntunen were always willing to help, she says.

The most important matter in Evelyn's life has been living faith. She grew up in a believing home and is still today endeavoring in that childhood faith.

Evelyn's message to young people today: Live day by day. Remain in God's kingdom. Keep going to services. Don't heed the temptations of the world. When you fall into sin, care for matters so as not to lose your faith.

## Elders Are My Friends

**Patti Johnson**

Elders have been a special part of my life. There were many elders in Dunblane, Sask., which was my home congregation for many years. My parents often invited them to our farm for visits and set a good

example of how important it is to have friends of all ages. I enjoyed having them over. Although we kids didn't contribute much to the conversation, we listened to their stories and helped mom serve coffee and goodies. I continue to value the friendships I have with elders.

I went to high school in Outlook, and during lunch hour my sisters and I ate our lunch at various elders' homes in town. Our grandparents Amelia and Toivo Ylioja, whom we called Mummu and Faari, lived just a few blocks from school. We went there regularly. They always welcomed us and Faari often had soup cooking on the stove. After lunch, Mummu served tea in her china teacups.

During free time from school, I would go help Mummu clean the house or bake cookies. Those were special times for me. I was a quiet and shy girl in school, so it was nice to go to a warm, secure place! Mummu was a patient and kind lady. She supported me through my high school years, probably without realizing it, by always being there and welcoming me no matter how often I went to her home. Mummu was called to heaven shortly after I graduated from high school. I realized later how fortunate I was to have had her in my life, even for those few short years.

When I got married three years ago and moved to Minneapolis, I was thankful to see many elders in the congregation. They welcomed me and listened to my many laments as I adjusted to life in a new country and congregation. They also supported me when I became a mother.

Congregation member Florence Parks has especially been a support and comfort to me. She makes time to come greet with God's Peace at church and is always willing to listen and visit. We have worked together cleaning and organizing in the kitchen, and I have enjoyed spending time with her.

The elders support the work in God's kingdom, temporally and spiritually. They pitch in and help at bake sales, serve in the kitchen, clean and organize and even mow the lawn. They are a stable part of any congregation. I encourage the youth to go to visit the elders and learn from their many life experiences.

## Dad Teaches Life Lessons

### **Janelle Lake**

My dad, Robert (Bob) Johnson, was born in 1944, in Virginia, Minn. His dad, grandpa and uncles all worked together at the family's dairy business, where they milked the cows, bottled the milk and delivered it to each home.

Growing up in a small rural town in the 1950s is quite different than what we know today, dad says. The neighborhood residents looked out for each other, played with each other and got to know each other quite well.

## **From Dairy to Laundry**

In 1963, dad's parents Arne and Wendla moved their family from northern Minnesota to Phoenix, where they bought a dry cleaning and laundry business. Dad and mom, Bernice Ylitalo, were married in Minneapolis in 1965. In 1968, they moved to Phoenix to help my grandparents in the business. Dad and his brother purchased the business from my grandfather in 1970.

My siblings and I grew up working in nearly every aspect of the business. Dad taught the necessity of hard work and fruitful labors. As young children, our insistence to learn probably tried his patience, but he diligently let us work the till standing on a chair as he stood near and coached us through each transaction. As we grew and took on greater responsibilities, the lessons he taught us became more in-depth as well.

## **Serve with the Gifts You Are Given**

A longtime member of the Phoenix congregation, my dad had various duties including board member, treasurer and Sunday school teacher. He was a good example to us of a diligent worker in God's kingdom. Between raising twelve children and owning a business, dad was busy. He taught us that even though we all are busy, it takes all gifts in God's kingdom to contribute to the whole congregation. Even with his duties, he found time to take us camping and on trips. We have many fond memories of our childhood days.

Dad sold Johnson's Cleaners in 2007 and retired. In 2016, dad and mom moved to Menahga, Minn. He has enjoyed being part of the elders' group in the northern Minnesota congregations. Six of his children and 23 of his 83 grandchildren are in the Menahga area, and we surely have enjoyed his presence here.

A large family brings many blessings and joys, yet we along with dad have also known sadness. Three of his grandchildren – Philip Harju (age 15), Justin Warwaruk (age 18) and Isaac Warwaruk (9 mo.) – are now angels in heaven. Dad has also filled a special role to my two daughters because their father – my husband – passed away before our youngest Lanna was even born. Dad's grandchildren are special to him and he cherishes the time he can spend with each one.

## **Respecting our Elders**

Dad is willing to give advice and lend a helping hand to his family and anyone who may be asking. Many young people have asked for his financial advice over the years. Dad has also taught us about the importance of respecting our elders, including teachers and others in roles of authority outside the home.

We are thankful God has given us parents and others in our lives who teach us valuable lessons and help us on our way to heaven. We respect them and honor the important role they play in our lives. We pray that God will grant many more years to our dad so we can still learn from him.

## **Discussion Points**

1. In what ways do elders teach us and care for us?
2. How can we honor an elder?
3. How do we care for elders in our lives, in our families, in our congregations? Can we help even in a small way?
4. What special memories do you have of an elder?