

Meet the Miller matriarch

By
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IVN Contributing Writer

Audrey Miller, better known as Mamo to family and close friends, has had a busy but fulfilling life. Miller is the proud mother of 13 children ranging in ages from 46 to their early sixties.

Born in Kansas, Miller attended college to become a registered nurse. She attended Marymount College in Kansas and then went to Wichita, Kansas for further schooling in nursing. Miller was a nurse from 1949 to 1973, working in several different hospitals over the years. She started her career at St. Joseph's in Kansas and continued nursing at Riverside Community Hospital and a retirement home in California. She also worked for a children's hospital while living in Alaska.

Audrey met and quickly fell for the charming Ursal Miller and they soon married. Mr. Miller came from a small family, having only a brother and as a result, he wanted a large family. Mrs. Miller, on the other hand grew up in a large family and was used to having siblings constantly around. In 1951, Audrey and Ursal were blessed with their first child, John, followed by Jay, Donnie, Regina, Angela, Madonna, Martin, Sara, Michelle, Matthew, Julie, Patricia and Mark.

Most of them now live in the Valley area while Donnie lives in Washington but plans on moving to the Illinois Valley. Regina also lives in Washington. Madonna resides in Utah, Julie lives in California and Patricia lives in Grants Pass.

Over the years, while the Millers were growing up they moved back and forth from California, Oregon and Alaska. During the years of shuffling between states, Mr. Miller dabbled in farming while belonging to a carpenters union and having his own business. Mrs. Miller recalled that when they moved to Alaska, her sister-in-law and her five children also traveled with them. Because of the size of the family, over 20 members, the family received a lot of attention including interviews from the media.

When asked what it was like to be a mother of 13 children a smile appeared on Mrs. Miller's face and she replied, "For me, it was fulfilling. I had already had my career and I enjoyed it myself."

About the only time the Miller family went anywhere together was to attended church every Sunday. With such a large group, church members would tell Mrs. Miller that they felt sorry for her. Now, however, they envy her, saying she is lucky to have such a family. Something that Audrey has always shared with her family and friends is her faith. She is a very

devout Catholic and has always been a great example of love and faith. That love is still carried on to this day, Audrey is a proud grandmother of 79 grandkids and 83 great-grandchildren. Miller couldn't be happier to have so many grandchildren running around.

"It's wonderful. They take care of me. I enjoy them most of the time," she joked.

Audrey has been very involved with her grandchildren and great-grand kids. Before she fell and broke her hip she was at almost every event involving the grandkids. Though she still is involved with her grandchildren, it is slightly harder for her to get around, but family members make sure that Audrey makes as many events as possible. Audrey now just goes with the flow and does what she can; sometimes having to remind family members she can still do certain things.

Miller now lives with her son, Martin, and his wife, Carrie, who are able to help with everyday tasks.

"If you don't use it, you'll lose it," said Miller.

Patty, the youngest daughter, thought growing up that she was adopted because they had a farm in Selma and she didn't like to get dirty. She was more of a city girl.

What was it like to grow up in a large family? Was it chaotic, smooth or busy?

"Constant chaos. There was someone always crying, fighting, someone in trouble, cooking, going to the bathroom," said Patty. "We were never alone."

Because of such a large family, there were hardly ever any chances to be alone. Patty recalls being alone for the first time in the house when she was eleven. Patty did not have her own bed till she was sixteen. With all those kids there was never a dull moment and there was always plenty of work to be done. A typical morning consisted of everyone pitching in and irrigating the half acre garden followed by other daily chores. Then it was off to school and sports then home again to help with the cooking and daily cleaning around the house.

Although she is not sure how her parents always made sure that each child had everything they needed, none of the Miller kids ever went without. There were plenty of presents come Christmas time, each kid had new clothes for the start of school, though Mamo did most of the sewing of the clothes. Family was Mr. Miller's pride, he valued everything he had and instilled that into his children.

Patty has three children, a small number compared to what she grew up around. Raising a smaller family was different for Patty. When she cooked, she cooked for a large family, she finally was able to get to

know herself and learn who she was. Although she missed her siblings dearly, the quietness of a small family was welcomed. Patty and her family eventually moved back to Illinois Valley so that her children could grow up with their cousins. She wanted to instill in her kids that family closeness that she had with her siblings while growing up.

When asked about having a favorite memory growing up, Patty laughed and said there were many. One that stuck out was when they lived in Alaska. For two summers they lived at an old miner's camp called Kennecotte Mines.

"We lived in the mess hall for two summers. It had two dining rooms with 13 sleeping rooms. All 13 kids ended up sleeping in one room because that is what they we were used to. One summer we were picking blackberries and saw a black bear. Every kid booked it back to the mess hall," Patty recalled while Audrey was giggling in the background.

Another memory was of her two older brothers. Jay and John had a habit of making sure that their sister's prom dates would behave themselves. The date was welcomed by the two brothers sitting out on the porch, each with a smile and shotgun in hand.

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Library ... Continued from A-1

There were 114 nominations submitted for six volunteer categories. The nominations were reviewed by volunteer-engagement leaders from across the state. The award was announced last week.

Of the 32 awards this year, 24 are regional awards. JCL is being awarded one of the eight state-level awards, in the category of Not-for-Profit Volunteer Program. Representatives from Josephine Community Libraries will be honored on April 24 at the Governor's Volunteer Awards Luncheon in Salem.

"These volunteers represent the very best of Oregon," said Governor Kitzhaber. "They have found and filled needs in their community, using common purpose, compassion, and ingenuity to make a huge and lasting difference. I congratulate and thank them for their service."

The libraries in Josephine County closed

on May 17, 2007. Four months later, committed community members formed Josephine Community Libraries, Inc., a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring long-term library services for every county resident. By December 2009, JCLI had reopened all four shuttered locations. It continues to operate thanks to generous donations and the heroic contributions of more than 360 volunteers. Anyone interested in getting involved with the library effort can send an e-mail to info@josephinelibrary.org. Those interested in donating can send a check or money order payable to "Josephine Community Libraries" to P.O. Box 1684, Grants Pass, OR 97528 or make a secure donation at www.josephinelibrary.org.

For more information, visit www.oregon-volunteers.org.

Masons award April Student of the Month



(Photo by Judy Hoyle, Illinois Valley News)

Belt Masonic Lodge #18 Worshipful Master Michael Yanase (left), Senior Warden Randy Kent and April Student of the Month Solomon Zook pose with Zook's plaque at the April Lodge meeting at the Kerby Belt Building. Zook will again compete in social studies at this year's Academic Masters. He has a 4.19 GPA and will major in computer science at the University of Oregon. His parents are Cathy Bockstiegel and Cody Zook.

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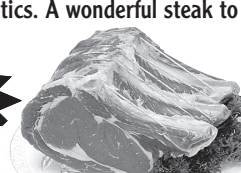
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