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### Oral History Interview: Nellie G. Adkins

Nellie G. Adkins

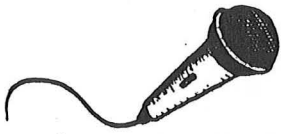
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# Oral History Donor Form

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 Date 10-27-05

**Transcript of Interview Done With Nellie Adkins**  
**October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2005**

**Interviewer:** Kelsey Austin

**Interviewee:** Nellie Adkins

1.) Go ahead and say your name.

**Nellie:** --Nellie Adkins

2.) Of course, uh, what was, what was family like before marriage?

**Nellie:** --Well, uh very good, uh. I dated Larry, uh probably a year, year and half before we got married and uh I lived in Huntington with a bunch of girls and we went to business school and then we all got jobs. (Phone Rang and she had to answer) (Continuing Answer) So uh, it was a happy time. We, we had a good time and uh, just working in Huntington and uh enjoying life.

3.) Ok, and uh what, you said your husband's name is Larry?

**Nellie:** --Larry, yea, Larry Adkins

4.) And when were you married? What was the date?

**Nellie:** --Larry and I got married May 14, 1965

5.) And how old were each of you?

**Nellie:** --Larry was 23 and I was 21.

6.) And, um, in 1964 were you dating, were the two of you dating?

**Nellie:** --We dated in 1964, uh, I worked for what it use to be, uh the United Fuel Gas Company and he worked for uh, what you call Carbide in Charleston. So we both worked and dated.

7.) And when did you guys officially begin dating?

**Nellie:** --We, we dated probably, uh, probably maybe, started dating in 1963 cause I graduate in 62, I wasn't dating him then so we probably started about in 63.

8.) And, so you guys, when did you guys officially uh, decide to get married or get engaged?

**Nellie:** --We decided, uh, I waited till I was 21 because my dad was real strict. I didn't want to ask him if I could get married so I waited till I was 21 which was in March, and we got engaged in March when I was 21 and uh got married in May of 1965. So we was engaged probably what, a year.

9.) Ok, so I guess in 1964, when um, Lyndon B. Johnson was elected, of course he went on the big campaign ya know that he wasn't going to send American boys over and everything, um was your husband in the military or fiancé in the military at that time?

**Nellie:** --No my husband got drafted.

10.) So, in your mind in 1964, did you ever think that he would actually be in Vietnam?

**Nellie:** --Oh yes, oh yes, there was a lot of, a lot of people going, especially here, it was a small town and a lot of people were going, oh yea, yea, we talked about it a lot. We, we was not surprised that he got drafted.

11.) And how did that affect the community, I guess knowing that ya know this is coming up?

**Nellie:** --Well, uh, there were a lot of boys here in this area that was Larry's age that was married and a lot of boys that uh, had children. Now back then, ya know that was real, I don't know how, how they do it now but ya know that was, In fact I hate to say it but they was a lot of them that went ahead and had their children so they wouldn't have to go. We had some close friends that did that because uh, it wasn't an honor to go to Vietnam like you think it would have been. Um, I mean it, it was bad but uh, so uh, ya know, we went, we both attended the same church and uh his mom and dad. He came from 13 children, had 10 of them that had been in the wars. I mean he even had a sister that went so uh, they didn't uh, I noticed that his mom got real upset because he was like the 12<sup>th</sup> of 13 children. Had a younger brother but back then because Larry went, the younger brother didn't have to go so he never did have to go and that was because ya know, Larry went, so, but ya know, they were upset cause they was up in years and they didn't want him to go but had to do it.

12.) Um, so in 1965, I guess, do you recall what you were going through in January of 1965?

**Nellie:** --Oh, we were happy in January of 1965. Uh ya know, we, uh, of course he didn't go until August of 1965 is when he, when he went so uh we were living in Huntington and had an apartment and both of us working, doing good.

13.) And did uh, you guys got married in March right?

**Nellie:** --We got married in May of 1965 and he went in August of 65 so we was only married for six or seven months and uh, I just uh, I couldn't live down there by myself.

Um, I was a person that was terrified. I still am so I moved back home with my mom and dad.

14.) And how did that affect you when he did get sent, sent off knowing that you had been married three months and then now he was leaving?

Nellie: --Oh, it just, it just disrupts your whole life. I mean ya know, I, we packed up and I put everything in storage and just put life on hold. But what, what was so unusual with Larry getting drafted, once he done with his basic he went straight to Vietnam. He didn't, he didn't go to a base for a year, he went straight right out of basic training. He went to Fort Knox, then they shipped him right to Vietnam so ya know, it was immediately, which it really surprised us that he'd go that fast but he did.

15.) Now during this time, was there any communication between the two of you?

Nellie: --While he was in basic at Fort Knox?

16.) Basic and Vietnam

Nellie: --Oh yea, we, uh I went down to see him several times cause Fort Knox is a short drive and I would go down and see him and uh, but he wasn't allowed to leave but uh, I would go down and visit with him on weekends, or ya know when he had a day off or something. But, uh, uh, but I didn't get to see him, they just took him straight, uh, uh, I went down to visit him and he was, he was gone.

17.) Now, when he got called to duty, um there in August of 65. Were there any concerns that were going through your mind at this time?

Nellie: --Oh my goodness yes, I remember getting the letter out of the mailbox and uh, ya know, uh, I didn't open it because I knew what it was and I let him open it. But ya know, people, they was just getting killed, I mean shhh, it was horrible. I mean it was on TV everyday, and, and uh but ya know, but one thing about it, his mom wrote a letter to Robert C. Byrd asking that he not be put into the infantry because she had, had some bad experiences with her older sons. Larry had ten brothers, nine brothers, so she had wrote a letter and so they, that's why he got in transportation so Robert Byrd saw that Larry got in transportation and not infantry so that helped a lot knowing he would be in the battleground, ya know, so, but that helped a lot.

How um,

Nellie: --I didn't know that for years, that Ida had wrote a letter, but we just thought he lucked out and got in transportation, but evidently Robert Byrd pulled some strings and got him in.

18.) And um, did it make it, uhh, I wouldn't say easier but did it make it better that you knew he was in transportation?

**Nellie:** --Oh yes, what Larry did, was that he would go to the airport, get the boys, take them, and he would take them to airport when they were leaving and he did that everyday, back and forth to the airport so it was.

19.) Now, did it, did it still present I guess fears or doubts in your mind knowing that he was still there?

**Nellie:** --Oh yea, because ya know they would bomb and uh, ya know there would be bombs in different places, and uh, ya know they'd have those um everyday, and everyday he would hear of something besides in the infantry so, oh yea you worried everyday, ya know it was on your mind constantly.

20.) And, um what do you remember about the day that your husband got sent off to Vietnam?

**Nellie:** --I will never forget that day, (chuckles) I didn't get to see him sent off to Vietnam, the last time I seen him uh, he went right before Christmas, December the 18<sup>th</sup>, but uh, they took, he was over there, he spent Christmas over there, uh but we, we had Christmas before he left and uh did our Christmas on December the 18<sup>th</sup> and then he, if I can remember, there was several of them, I don't know if they got on a bus or if they got on a plane, but then they went straight, of course the probably went to California or somewhere, I don't know but we had our Christmas on December the 18<sup>th</sup> and he arrived over there on Christmas day. I never will forget it, that he got to Vietnam on December the 25<sup>th</sup>, 1965.

21.) And, being I guess probably Christmas and knowing that he was over there and then being away from him on Christmas, how did that affect you?

**Nellie:** --Probably the most saddest time that I had, probably cried, it was really sad, it really, it really was, but one thing good about it was that the following year he got to come back and he got back about two days before Christmas so that was good because the following year, we got to have Christmas together so that was good.

22.) Could you say that during this time, that he was away that it was almost a consistent countdown to when he would return?

**Nellie:** --You know I can't believe we did what we did but we wrote each other everyday. I had probably 365 letters and he had 365 letters, we kept these letters for years and years and years in a big box and got rid of them, can you believe we did that? But we had all, we had all these letters in this big box, I kept a few of them, I just stuck them in my drawer but why I got rid of those, its unbelievable, but we did, he wrote me everyday and I wrote him everyday and its really hard to try, try to figure out something to write, ya know but we did, we wrote each other everyday and we had the letters.

23.) Did the, um, did the letters make it easier to cope I guess with him?

**Nellie:** --Yes, and there were several times, he got to call me, I had an R&R that I was gonna, I was gonna go see him in Hawaii, already had my ticket, and uh, at the last minute they changed their mind, they didn't send him to Hawaii, they sent him to uh, I can't remember where they sent him but I couldn't have went but I remember I already had my plane ticket, because they paid for it and everything, but I didn't get to go but he called me a couple of times, like they would send him on R&R and he would call me so I got to talk to him probably about two times in that year.

24.) Um, what were your concerns and worries then, while he was gone?

**Nellie:** --Uh, Larry is uh, Larry never did the bar scenes, he never did the drinking and all of that, I think that's really one thing he discouraged our boys, because he said 99% of them, they do the bars, they do the drinking and he was kinda a loaner, didn't have very many friends, I worried about him on that a little bit, he had one guy that he got, he was real close to that didn't, didn't do the bars, the drinking and all of that but uh, he uh, I worried about him some cause he was just a hometown boy, ya know, real close to his family, but, but he did fine.

25.) Could you say that you were most worried then about him coming back and not being the same person?

**Nellie:** --Oh, yea, yea, uh, he, he wouldn't talk about it much, uh he had a lot of, he had a lot of movies he took, uh, he had several friends that, that lost their lives over there uh, but uh, it was ones that he had took basic with that had ended up within infantry and uh, but I think he was really lucky, I think Larry was really fortunate that he got where he was and didn't have to see a lot of that. I don't really think he could have coped with it.

26.) Now you mentioned television earlier, did the portrayal of television, the way they were showing it and stuff kinda of um scare you in a way too?

**Nellie:** --It wasn't an honor to be in Vietnam, nobody looked up to ya or anything, and I never will forget when I picked him up, up in Charleston at the airport, ya know Larry came off there by himself, I mean it was, it wasn't like it is today where people would greet you like these people that's going over there now(referring to Iraq war) and you see it on TV and they're all hugging and got signs up. You didn't see any of that, it wasn't, it didn't exist and he had, he came off of there on crutches, Larry, the bus had run over and broke his foot so I never will forget him coming off of there by himself just him with his uniform on, on crutches but it, it was so different than it is now, it wasn't an honor to be in Vietnam. It was just like a disgrace really, nobody looked up to you.

27.) Um, then while he was gone, we discussed earlier about what family life was like I guess before while he was gone, what uh, what was family life like during then?

**Nellie:** --Before he left? After?

No while he was gone?

**Nellie:** --Ya know I just counted the days, I, I, I went and got up and went to work everyday, uh, we financially did good because he would send me his checks and I would save it and to be honest with ya, that's how we got our start, he was over there and I was home working everyday, I had a good job, making good money and um, I just um, my mom and dad was up in years too so I helped them a lot and uh it went by, it went by pretty fast, I stayed real busy, ya know working, and uh, I think it was wonderful that we didn't have children, I think that would have been bad, but ya know the year went by fast.

28.) Now you lived with your parents, is that correct?

**Nellie:** --I lived with my mom and day, I went and moved back home, lived with them, moved from Huntington back to West Hamlin

29.) Was there, was there a reason maybe on more support there, or ya know I don't want to call it a crutch but ya know obviously you have familiar family to rely on in this time of need?

**Nellie:** --I had a lot of family in Huntington and Larry had a lot of family in Huntington, brothers and sisters on both, but like I said before, um, but I was terrified to stay by myself absolutely terrified, I am to this day, I have a problem, I would lock myself in the bathroom, I mean, ya know, I was terrified, I would no more stay in Huntington, we were down there right on 6<sup>th</sup> avenue in an apartment and uh traffic all night and people talking, and one of my best friends that I worked with from United Fuel Gas Company just got murdered like two months before in an ally about a block from where I lived. They never did find out who killed her and there's just no way I would stay down there by myself, absolutely no way, so that's why I decided to move back home, and I drove it everyday.

30.) Do you um, looking back now I guess, do you think that uh, that did help you make it through it a little easier living with your parents?

**Nellie:** --Oh yea, I had a life, ya know my mom and I would, I was close to my mom, we would do things together, and uh she never drove or anything so I would take her places all the time. She was thrilled that I came back home and I had a younger brother that I helped out a lot, he was only 16 at the time and I would let him drive my car and stuff, and then Larry's uh mom and dad, ya know I did a lot with them so ya know I stayed busy and I helped.

31.) And um, what was like to manage the finances and manage these things, of course I have read a lot of research that back then I guess ya know the man would take care usually of the finances and stuff like that. What was it like to I guess manage, manage these things by yourself now that he was gone?

**Nellie:** --I always managed everything and I do to this day. Larry don't write checks, he don't pay bills, I did when we first started marriage so that was no problem and like I told



you that's how we got started, uh he would send me his check, I would put it in the bank, I would save probably 65% of what I made, but I'd give mom and dad a little bit of money, I wasn't out of anything. That's how we financially got started because I was able to save quite a bit of money that year that he was over there.

32.) And uh, was there uh, looking back, do you think there any impact on the family, on you, on your, your mom and dad, his mom and dad or anything while he was gone at war?

**Nellie:** --No, I don't, ya know it turned out ok, he, he uh came back alright, he uh went back to his job the same job he had which they held for him so his seniority was ok.. I think his mom and dad worried, ya know my mom and dad, ya know they, uh, ya know I come from a family of 10, Larry comes from a family 13 and they had all these other siblings, ya know so I don't, I can't see where, no much of an impact.

33.) Is there something that you depended on most when your husband was gone at war, community, uh, something in the community, friends, church, family, anything like that.

**Nellie:** --Oh definitely my church and my family, we're real close,uh my church, always been real active in church, Ida, Ida and Larry's mom and dad started, well there was, icons in that church, my mom and dad, ya know went to church all the time and uh, just uh did things with my, I had a lot of sisters, just did things with my family.

34.) How did your faith help you in this time?

**Nellie:** --Oh gosh, 100%, ya know uh I, I, I just don't know how people would go through something like that if they didn't have God to turn to.. I really don't. Oh it was 100%

35.) And, uh, you already talked about you provided for the family by his checks right?

**Nellie:** --Yea

36.) And this is something if you feel free to talk about, you mentioned letters you wrote back and forth between each other. As far as, did um he ever describe what was going on over there?

**Nellie:** --Sometimes, he would say well they bombed so and so last night and so many got killed and sometimes he would comment on the boys that he picked up from the airport. Uh, some of them, pretty bad, ya know and um then he would say this is a happy day because I got to take so many to the airport where they were going home. Then he would say this is a sad day because I had to bring them in for a year. So, I mean it was like that everyday, he would comment on um so and so got a letter and said his wife was going to divorce him and so and so got a letter where his mom had died.

37.) Do you think these letters were encouraging? Or do you, I mean at times they were probably encouraging, at times were they also, did they make you kinda worry too knowing that he was talking about these bombings and stuff like that?

**Nellie:** --The letters really helped, umm ya know just to hear from him and ya know even though some of it was sad ya know they helped ya know. He didn't really talk a lot about the bad stuff. Every now and then he would bring it in but he always was real positive and talked a lot about having children when he got home and all of that stuff and ya know where we was going to live. Ya know he was at Huntington Alloys at that time, so he was going back to there. He, He more less talked about upbeat things, he never talked to much about the and he would send me, he sent me a Vietnam doll and he sent me uh clothes. He would mail me stuff all the time ya know and I would have to take pictures and send back to him(chuckling). So ya know we did ok.

38.) How did you find out he was returning?

**Nellie:** --We always knew. They was pretty really I mean a year, the year, it was amazing. December 18<sup>th</sup> he left, he came home on December 18<sup>th</sup>. So, well he left here but he arrived there on the 25<sup>th</sup> but he left here, but he left in Vietnam the following December the 18<sup>th</sup> and we, it was just, I knew, we knew all along that that's when he would be leaving but it was probably like the 22<sup>nd</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup> before I picked him up at the airport in Charleston but we, we knew it, we always knew it.

39.) And, um as it was getting closer I guess to that, to that date and you knowing that, how did that make you feel?

**Nellie:** --Very excited. Uh, I rented, we rented us a place in Barboursville. I had it already rented and ready for him when he come home. We had a place. And I never will forget, it was on a Sunday morning I was going up to pick him up and I left my, I left mom's and I remember her hugging me and telling me how happy she was for me. She said even though I am going to miss you, I am happy. I never will forget that, she, when I left. And uh I picked him, it was on a Sunday morning and uh we went to our place in Barboursville. And his mom and dad, uh he slept a lot because he had been up a lot and his mom and dad came down I think that very afternoon to see him. It was on a Sunday, I remember that.

40.) And when he returned home, did you have a celebration that day?

**Nellie:** --Uh, not that day, he seen his mom and dad and then uh I think the next morning, I think we drove up here and I have a sister, her husband and their real good friends, and we went to see them. But now you have to remember he still has another year to serve so he had to go Fort Dicks, New Jersey and came in on weekends for a year. So I think that was hard, that was horrible because I hated staying down there by myself, I was scared but I had to because I had to go to work and uh he would leave, he wouldn't come home every weekend, and uh ya know he for a year that's what we did. That was the longest year I think that Vietnam because I was home and I was real busy doing things. Down

there I was, down there all week by myself and it was long weeks. I think I, I think I hated that year worse than the other year.

41.) Did um, so he was gone a year after he returned and he only got home weekends and I guess how did that um, how did that affect you then I mean knowing that he was in country but now I mean ya know you could only see him on weekends?

Nellie: --Like I told you, I hated that year, It was horrible. It was a long week, sometimes it would be two weeks before he'd come home and uh, I, I didn't like it at all, He didn't either.

42.) And uh, looking back on Vietnam now, and seeing how your family I guess has turned out, and ya know have children and uh still married and everything like that. Um, do you think that um Vietnam played some kind of impact on your family?

Nellie: --I think it played a negative uh like I ya know we have three boys. Every time they would mention going into the service. My husband would talk to them no way. He never wanted them to go. I think it was because all of the drinking, partying he had seen and um he just uh, he just never wanted any, I had one, I had one that was seriously talking about going, my youngest one and he just, he was absolutely a 100% against it. He just did not want them to go into the service.

43.) And um, let's see here, is there anything else that you think or any way other way that you think that's been left out that you think Vietnam's affected your family?

Nellie: --Uh I think Vietnam was a big mistake, um just like I think this Iraq is a big mistake. Uh nothing was accomplished in Vietnam, it was just, it was, uh some of the nightmares, stories that I have heard, uh, its just, we've had, we had a couple of friends, I, I graduated with three boys that lost their lives in Vietnam and uh got a real good friend that's an invalent because of Vietnam so uh I, I don't see anything positive that came out of it, I can't tell you anything that came out of it positive.