



Elwood Selby, a true 'people person'

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Philadelphia Daily News

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IT WASN'T uncommon for Scott Selby to come upon his father, Elwood A. Selby, chatting away with somebody on the street or on the Atlantic City Boardwalk as if he had known the person for years.

But when Scott questioned him, it turned out that his father had never seen the person before.

That was the kind of guy Elwood was. There was no such thing as a stranger in his life. He was gregarious in the extreme.

Elwood Selby, longtime supervisor with the Department of Defense-supply center in Philadelphia, former produce manager for local supermarkets, and a veteran of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen during World War II, died April 27. He was 88 and lived in West Oak Lane.

This "people person," as his son described him, was also a neighborhood treasure, never hesitating to help his neighbors even if it meant taking them to the store, or to doctor's appointments - whatever they needed. Elwood was there for them.

His son said that his father's motto was: "If I can just help somebody, then I know my living has not been in vain."

"He was known for his smile, which truly lit up a room," his son said.

"People gravitated to my Dad," Scott said. "He had an aura about him that drew people to him. He was a talker; he could talk for hours."

"He had a real good sense of humor. He was a jokester."

"He taught his children always to be respectful of others, and have good manners."

Elwood Selby was born in Pottstown, Montgomery County, the second of the seven children of Paul Hanson and Elsie Selby.

He graduated from Pottstown High School in 1938. He discovered that his career choices and access to trade schools were limited, so he decided to enlist in the Army.

He was assigned to the Tuskegee Airmen, an all African-American unit that trained pilots at Tuskegee, Ala. Elwood was on the ground crew, working with gyros.

He served from 1942 to 1945, and attained the rank of sergeant.

Home from the war, he married Betty Blackson, his high-school sweetheart, in 1946. They had six children.

"His children were his pride and joy," his family said. "His love for them was insurmountable."

He had a varied work career. He worked for the former Philadelphia Naval Shipyard. In 1957, he learned of an opportunity with the Defense Supply Center and worked his way up to supervisor of classified material and mail. He retired in 1985.

Elwood also worked for a number of supermarkets, including Penn Fruit, Pantry Pride and Pickwell. He was usually manager of the produce department.

"He was good with customers," his son said. "He would help them find what they were looking for and take care of them through the store."

That was what Elwood liked to do, take care of people.

Elwood enjoyed deep-sea fishing out from the Jersey Shore. He liked to garden and was an avid sports fan.

He was baptized last Sept. 6 at New Hope Full Gospel Baptist Church, in Norristown, by Bishop Wayne Ellis.

"He had a gentle, loving spirit," his family said.

Besides his wife and son, he is survived by three other sons, Elwood Selby Jr., Anthony Selby and Michael Selby; a daughter, Kim Rinehart; three sisters, Margaret Selby, Jennifer Selby and Dottie Selby; 16 grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by another son, Craig.