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SATURDAY, JULY 14, 2007

Local Edition 50 cents



"My brother! Praise the Lord. Thank you, Lord."

— Oma Overton



Tribune Photo/BARBARA ALLISON

Oma Overton, 93, of Elkhart, reacts with delight upon seeing her brother Earl Tidwell, 95, of Alabama, and his family during a video conference Friday. With her is her granddaughter, Julia Overton Maloney of LaGrange, Ill., who helped arrange the event for her grandmother and two of her great uncles. At left is Overton's great-granddaughter, Audrey Maloney, 6.

Aging siblings spend some time together, thanks to technology

Long-awaited reunion



Overton, center, says goodbye to her brother Earl Tidwell, 95, in Alabama Friday afternoon after a video conference reunion from a downtown South Bend office building. With her are, from left, daughter Tressie McCavitt of Elkhart; granddaughter Julia Overton Maloney of LaGrange, Ill.; daughter Onie McQueary of Elkhart; and daughter Norma Jean Zimmerman, also of Elkhart.

By **YONIKA WILLIS**
Tribune Staff Writer

SOUTH BEND — Oma Overton, with her silver hair pulled into a bun and wearing a patterned, purple dress, quietly sat in front of a television monitor, eager to hear her brother's voice.

It's been nearly 30 years since 93-year-old Overton of Elkhart has seen her older brothers, Earl and Reese Tidwell.

The three cling to memories of growing up together on a farm in Alabama, but age has weakened them, making everyday communication nearly impossible.

But with a little help from the video conferencing company, Intercall, and the work of Overton's granddaughter, the youngest of the bunch was able to communicate with her siblings on Friday from the comfort of her wheelchair in a downtown office building.

"I just wanted to make my grandma happy," said Overton's granddaughter, Julia Maloney of LaGrange, Ill. "She spent her whole life doing things for others. ... The only thing she wanted was to see her brothers."

Although she wasn't able to see her oldest brother, 98-year-old Reese Tidwell, she knew what to do when she heard his voice over the monitor, all the way from Camden, Ala.

"Hello there," she said. "You doing all right?"

Reese Tidwell didn't say much, but that didn't stop Overton.

"We don't get to see you very much," she went on. "I still love you and think of you."

"Just to hear the voice," she said with her arms outstretched toward the sky. "Praise the Lord. Thank you, Jesus."

After the brief call, Overton again sat silently in her chair, waiting for the image of her 95-year-old brother, Earl Tidwell, in Devils Springs, Ala., to appear in the screen.

She anxiously clapped her hands and gazed into the monitor, and when he appeared, he was dressed in overalls, a top hat and yellow gloves.

"My brother!" she cried out. "Praise the Lord. Thank you, Lord."

With his hearing failing him, it was hard for Earl Tidwell to communicate, but once he laid eyes on his baby sister, he perked up and asked those with him

in Alabama, "We can't go to where they're at?"

"No," they said with a laugh.

Overton stretched out her arms toward her brother and sobbed.

"It's been a long time since I've gotten to see you," he told her, "but it's good to see you. I love you a bunch. You're my little sister."

Earl Tidwell gestured a hug to his sister and blew her a kiss.

"Pray a prayer," he yelled to her.

Overton did as instructed, ending the sentiment with, "We will meet one day where there won't be no separation. What a beautiful place."

She praised the Lord and asked her brother if he thought they'd make it to 100.

"I don't know," he said. "I'm getting pretty old."

With a wave goodbye, Earl Tidwell said, "Oma, I'll see you again someday. I love you. You're my baby sister."

And when they see each other again, Overton said, "their bones won't ache."

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