

Geraldine "Gerri" (Doudera) Molina
A Kinmundy-Alma Story
2016

Geraldine Molina has "seen it all" from growing up in rural Alma to serving as Kinmundy police officer for 20 years. Her Marion County roots are so extensive that her grandson once complained that he would have to leave the state to find someone to marry who wasn't related to him. In 1887 the Salem Herald Advocate described a Foster Township neighborhood as Bohemia with the Jezek, Doudera, Bilek, and Mazanek families. Gerri's family tree includes them all.

Gerri's great grandfather, Matthew Doudera, was a master tailor in Bohemia before it was Czechoslovakia. He and his wife Marie had three children. Matthew died, and Marie married a Jezek. They had four children in four years. One of those children died on the ship bringing the family to this country. Matthew and Marie's son Frank was Gerri's grandfather. One of Gerri's earliest memories was visiting her grandfather in his final days and then going to his funeral visitation in the parlor of the family home. His sister, Anna, married John Mazanek Jr., Richard Mazanek's grandparents. A Bilek married into the family completing the Bohemia community. Fruit farming was a family specialty. Frank had a pear and apple orchard. Son Ed had a peach orchard and barbered in his home cutting hair for fifty cents. Son Tom also had a peach orchard. Son Joe raised watermelons and could be counted on for fresh melons for Christmas by carefully preserving them in hay.

Gerri doesn't have as much information about the Williams side of her family because it was a smaller family, and they lived a little farther away on the Patoka Road. Relatives from that branch of the family include Tom Swift, Jerry Chasteen, Jim Williams, and Paul Williams. Her Grandfather Shirley Forest Williams was a farmer and worked on the C&EI Railroad. Gerri named her daughter for him, but it became confusing when Jill married because she became Shirley Jill Shirley.

Cousin Terry Hicks lived with the Williams grandparents some of the time because of the constant travel required of his dad's job. Gerri has fond memories of some of their antics. Grandma Georgie would bury jars of money in the yard. Gerri and Terry made a game of searching for the buried treasure. They never took any of it. They just buried the jars again. Grandma had no sense of smell. Once they brought a family of baby skunks to the back porch, and Grandma didn't even notice. Just to test her, they would eat garlic out of the garden and breathe on her. After Grandpa and Grandma moved to Alma and Grandpa was forbidden to smoke, he would go to the garage to smoke. If Grandma couldn't see him, she never knew because she couldn't smell the smoke.

Gerri and her sisters, Joyce Holley and Patsy Kolner grew up in the home where their father and grandfather had lived. There was no running water. Gerri joked that they had running water when someone would run it in from outside. There were two pumps outside the house—one with fresh spring water and one with hard water. Water was heated on the stove in the smokehouse/summerhouse to use in the washing machine for Monday's laundry. Beans would be cooking on the stove as the clothes were washed and hung on the line. A separate room in the smokehouse held a claw foot tub for bathing. The family raised a large garden and kept all their canned goods in the cellar of the summerhouse. Gerri was a tomboy and enjoyed going rabbit and squirrel hunting with her dad and picking up corn left in fields after the harvest to feed their chickens. They also cut wood to replenish the stack that covered the back porch. The other source of fuel came from a strip mine at the back of the farm. The extended family would gather to dig the coal for each home after removing the layer of slate covering the coal to use as their driveway surface instead of gravel.

Even though the family was poor, they had lots of fun. Gerri's dad was an excellent cook and liked to entertain with wiener roasts and hayrides. He would be on the lookout all year for the perfect cedar tree from the woods for Christmas. He kept the radio on all night to KMOX, and continuing the tradition, anyone visiting Gerri will hear the radio playing regardless of the hour. He also liked to run string to the second floor of the house for morning glories to climb. Gerri has a pleasant memory from her childhood as morning glories go up the side of her house each year.

Gerri's Uncle John lived with the family. He always made Christmas special by giving the children Christmas clothes and dolls. Uncle John must have been tough. Israel Molina still laughs about coming with Gerri for a visit and staying in Uncle John's former room. The room was so cold that the hot water bottle they used for warmth had ice in it the next morning. Israel wasn't familiar with outhouses. Always the fun loving guy, Gerri's dad made Burma Shave style signs pointing the way for Israel to find the outhouse.

In the time before readily available housing, people found a place to live however they could. After Uncle John's death, another older man came to live with Doudera family. Gerri really doesn't know anything about him except that he sat around whittling and chewing tobacco. Gerri and Joyce had a playhouse in the yard, and the old man carved wooden dishes, forks, and spoons to furnish their playhouse.

For her first five years of school, Gerri attended the one-room Greenridge School. All of the children played together regardless of age. When they played ball, everyone wanted to be on the team John Jones led because he was such a good ballplayer. At Christmas, the school had a Christmas program and the children presented gifts they had made for their relatives. The teacher provided textile paint and stencils, and children brought handkerchiefs, towels, and dresser scarves. Initials were painted on the handkerchiefs for men, and flowers were painted on the items for women. Gerri remembers painting a towel for her Aunt Jessie, which she purchased at an auction after her aunt's passing. This is a prized possession

Gerri went to Alma for sixth grade after the school consolidation and then to Kinmundy for 7th grade. When she was in the eighth grade, the family saw an ad in the Prairie Farmer for summer girls (nannies). Gerri applied in the winter, and both sets of parents corresponded. After grade school graduation, Gerri boarded a Greyhound at Sweeney Drug Store to Chicago to take full responsibility for four small children, clean the house, and do the laundry for \$15 a week. The next summer, she was a summer girl for an affluent Jewish couple. She cared for three children and was paid \$17.50 a week. She did all the ironing and cooked breakfast, lunch, and early dinner if the dad was in the city. Gerri made

the mistake of telling the mother that she was a 4-H member and took Home Economics classes. Then she was asked to make dresses for the youngest girl. She did have her own room in the basement, and the dad would take a group of summer girls downtown on their day off, and then they would take the train back. They saw West Side Story, window shopped, and walked along the beach. Gerri held this job for three summers. After high school graduation, she found secretarial employment and continued to live with the family in exchange for evening babysitting. A coworker introduced Gerri to her brother, Israel Molina. They married and welcomed Michael and Jill to the family. A memorable event for Gerri during this time was serving as a translator during the Waukegan race riots.

In 1977, the Molina family moved to Marion County. Gerri worked as a cook at Dr's Nursing Home and sewed Miss Elaine's nightgowns until she saw an ad for a Kinmundy police officer. She was given the job on a 30-day trial basis. Twenty years later, she retired. No names can be given, but these are a few highlights. Gerri successfully negotiated with an alcoholic while staring down the barrel of his shotgun. She says the barrel looked as big as a 50-gallon drum. She arrested out of state drivers with a stolen vehicle. Women injured her twice in physical altercations, but she never received an injury from a man. She made an ambulance call where she encountered a rooster on the kitchen table and walked carefully through the area where dogs used the floor as their combination dining room/bathroom—all to get to the person who was ill.

When teenagers were caught with beer, Gerri made them pour it down the drain at the car wash. A favorite teenage prank was driving down the Main Street the wrong way when it was a one-way street. For misbehaving teens, Gerri assigned community service—picking up trash or washing the squad car, ambulance, or fire truck. The time was 11 a.m. on Saturday morning to make sure friends saw them. Most of the time, her relationship with the kids was helpful. She often patrolled near the gazebo. She counseled; she helped with homework, and is even credited with saving the life of a child living nearby. She drove around town checking on the elderly and the property of those out of town.

In retirement, Gerri continues to be a strong advocate for anyone in need. She will introduce someone as her best friend, but the truth is— Gerri Molina has countless best friends. The relatives are countless, too. Fortunately, Patsy Kolner has done extensive genealogy research and compiled a notebook with her findings, which can be accessed by contacting her or Gerri.