

Irene Livesay Gammon Memories  
2014

“My name is Irene Gammon. My mother was a Garrett. She came from the east side of Foster Township, and I was born and raised on the west side close to Patoka Township line. Willie Garrett family was my mother’s family. The Garretts all lived out there close to each other—about a mile apart. We visited a lot. You know people back then did. Every Sunday, even if you went to church, you had company. You either went someplace or you had someone at your house for Sunday dinner. After the dinner we visited, and the kids would play. My mother was of a family of 7 children, and they all had families and they all visited. We would also go to my grandparents quite often on weekends. They always worked during the week and didn’t do too much unless they were helping each other work.

I took my grade school at Patoka. I took my first year of high school at Patoka. It was just a three-year high school then. It was the Depression, and I remember that you didn’t have any money. That was why my folks moved up here. They had bought the farm, and they had it about half paid for. Then the Depression hit. They didn’t have money to pay on the loan. They had been paying on the principal as well as the interest. They couldn’t even pay the interest. You see, the price of the products they were selling like milk—They sold whole milk and eggs. They had lots of chickens. All this stuff wasn’t worth anything. They couldn’t get any money for it.

At that time, my folks, living on the farm, would buy feed for the chickens, and they would put it in sacks. That was during pretty hard times, and those feed sacks had very pretty figures. Some people made dresses out of them. They were kind of coarse material. My mother, I remember, used to make a lot of aprons out of them. They even made pillowcases out of them, and they liked them. They were helpful. They’d collect them. I remember my mother pulling them apart and washing them and pressing them. She had a piece of pretty figured material to make something out of. Fred’s mother, they lived in town, but they had chickens, and they had a cow so they bought some feed too. She collected them too. My mother and Fred’s mother both gave what they had left over to me. I donated my collection to the Kinmundy Historical Society.

So that was the Depression. They sold the place down there for half the price they paid for it. That was a big loss. Then of course they had to move, and they bought this house up here three miles northwest of Kinmundy. It was in real bad shape. My dad was real handy. He was a carpenter. He repaired it and fixed it up and they moved up here. I had one brother. He was a lot younger than me—10 years. That was all. They sold an oil lease and got enough money that they could pay for the house up here. It was hard times for quite a while.

Then I went to Kinmundy High School. I met my husband in school. He had already graduated and he had gone to college a couple of years at Carbondale. He was a little older than me—four years older. I was in my second year of high school. They put in new commercial courses. I remember the teacher Eugenia See Boyd, and Fred hadn’t had those so he took what they called a postgraduate course and took all those commercial subjects. He quit college because it was a little difficult—hard times around that time. It was Depression times. That’s how I met him. I took

some of those commercial courses too. Those courses were all down in the basement and he would be coming up the stairs out of his classes as I'd be going down. We met on the stairway going down to the basement at the school. That's where we met. He'd always speak to me every day and that went on all year I guess. He would also help coach. He had played basketball when he was in school and so when he came back to post graduate, the coach had him to help him out. He said, "Mostly I was blowing up basketballs." Anyway he called him his assistant. Anyway, the English teacher, she lived down in Salem. Every year she'd have a party for the basketball boys and the coach. They were to invite a friend to come to the party. Fred was invited, and he was to bring a friend, and that was our first date. He never got in a big hurry about anything, but not long after that he asked me if I would go to a movie with him. That's what you did when you were dating. You went to a movie in Salem, Mt. Vernon, Centralia, Vandalia, or Effingham. Then after the dates you would maybe go and get a hamburger and Coke or something. We ate in the town where we saw the movie. Fred went to Bargh's in Kinmundy a lot, but I never did. I guess I just wasn't the type who knew how to loaf. I didn't go in there much, but he did. It was his life. He loved his hometown—Kinmundy.

He waited for me until I got out of high school. We started dating when I was a sophomore and then I was sick. I went back, but I was too weak. You know how when you lay in bed, you are weak. So I had to gain strength. I took a rest year. Then I went back, and he wanted me to finish school before we got married. For a graduation gift, he gave me a diamond ring. A year later we got married—1940.

Fred had a lot of jobs. When we got married, he worked for St. Clair Oil Company, had a truck hauling wholesale. He delivered gas and oil to service stations. He'd go down to Salem, and he worked at a service station up here for Doyle Alexander—DX, I guess it was, and he drove a school bus. He was one of our first school bus drivers. He and Chester Mendenhall were the two that started out driving the first school buses. He enjoyed the children, and I think that's when he decided he wanted to teach school. . We were married three years, and then he had to go to the army. He was gone two years—one year in the states and one year overseas in Europe during the war. So I was all alone. We didn't have any children. His mother and dad lived in a big two-story house back here on Third Street. It's not there now. They had the whole upstairs, and they insisted I move over. They said, "There's room for all your furniture." They didn't want me living alone. My mother didn't either. I didn't mind being there alone, but I moved. When he came home from the service, he had no job, and there was no place for us to live. Of course, we stayed there with his folks for a while. During the war, my folks had moved to Decatur. My dad gave up farming. He had always farmed with horses, and it was changing to tractors. He was going to have to get a tractor and change his way or quit. He quit and went to Decatur and got a job. They got along better up there. When they retired, they bought this house across the street and lived til they died. Then Fred came back from the war and had no job, my dad said he could get him a job in Decatur. So we moved up to Decatur. We did live there two years. After he got home from the service, we had our first baby, a little boy. He was born in Decatur while we were there. It was funny. We couldn't find a place to live up there. We had to apply for apartments and wait on them. We lived with my folks until we could get in and the

baby came before. Just as soon as he got his discharge from the army, I got pregnant. We had been married six years by that time. I was always glad it happened that way because would have missed being with the children, and he loved those babies. We had two boys. That was all.

He didn't like to live up there. He loved Kinmundy. He put in an application for a building loan job up here. C.B. Rohrbough was the manager, and he was getting in bad shape. Fred put in his application. Mr. Rohrbough did pass away and Fred got the job. So we moved back down. For ten years, he worked at the Building and Loan. Then he'd also drive the bus. That's when he finished his college degree. They offered night courses around all the different towns, and so he went to every town around that would offer one of those college courses. He had his transcripts moved from Carbondale to McKendree at Lebanon. He took enough until he got enough to graduate. He had to go one summer on campus. Every morning he'd get up real early and go. He was busy. He graduated and got his degree that way.

After he got his degree from Lebanon, he was first principal at Alma. He took over when Grace Jackson retired. Back then he had to teach and be principal both. He taught fifth or sixth grades. When he got the job at Kinmundy, he did the same thing. He loved to teach. He loved those kids. Any of them that have gone to him will remember and tell me they loved him as a teacher and I'd say he loved every one of them.

I always worked. Before I got out of high school, they had a switchboard, Illinois Bell Telephone Company, and I started learning about it. When I got out of high school, I got a job at the switchboard. I worked off and on for ten years. I worked nights most of the time or part time. I worked until 1955 when they switched to dial, and we all lost our jobs here. We could have transferred someplace else, but we didn't want to leave Kinmundy. In 1957, I guess it was, I got a job at Salem working for the Department of Agriculture. I worked 17 years for the ASCS office in Salem. After that I worked a little bit, off and on, for the grocery stores here in Kinmundy. I worked for Jesse George until he died, and I still worked a little while for the Shoemaker brothers in the store. I've done a lot of things.

I've done several other things. I belonged to the Eastern Star in Kinmundy. Even after we merged with Salem, and I still went down and took office. I was Worthy Matron four times and Royal Neighbors. They sold life insurance, and I was recorder for I don't know how many years. There's a little plaque they gave me for 30 some years. I'd send in the money every month. I'd collect it, and people would pay. I was busy. I don't know how I did all that and worked too.

I was involved in scouts too. My boys and Fred were really involved in Scouts. Fred started the Cub Scouts, and I helped him with them. Jim Eagan was the Scoutmaster for the Boy Scouts, and our boys were in that. They went to Camp Joy. That's over by Carlyle. I guess it's still going, but anyway, it's a Boy Scout camp that's run in the summertime. Both boys spent the summers over there working. They had a lake over there and one son was a lifeguard. Fred worked there too because teaching school, he was off. I could have gone too, but I was working and couldn't. Our oldest boy became an Eagle Scout—I think the first Eagle Scout that Kinmundy ever had. He really worked at it. He did a lot of scout work.

Fred was mayor at one time. He wanted to be mayor so he could get water for the City of Kinmundy. We didn't have water at that time. He said, "I only want to be Mayor long enough to get water for the town." He had a lot of opposition because people said, "We have wells. We don't need water." That was going to cost them too much, they thought. Fred insisted the town would never amount to anything til we get water. We needed running water so we could have bathrooms. We didn't have anything but outdoor toilets. He thought a lot of his hometown. He wanted to modernize it, and he did. He worked real hard while he was mayor getting water for the City of Kinmundy. Then after he got the water, he quit being the mayor.

Daffodils is another thing I did. As I said, I don't know how I did all that. My husband's mother and dad were born and raised in Alma. Alma had a lot of daffodils that they would ship every spring on the train to Chicago. They raised lots of vegetables and fruits. Alma was quite a thriving place at one time. They had melons. They were known for their melons.

Fred's dad worked for the railroad. He was a telegrapher. He worked at the tower down here. The railroads cross here in Kinmundy, and there was a tower there that someone had to be there all the time to let the trains go back and forth where they crossed. They would have to wait on one another. That's what Fred's dad did. He worked for the railroad for 40 some years. After he retired, he heard they were switching to automatic. He said he didn't see how that would ever work. He thought it had to be done like he had always done it.

Getting back to the flowers—When Fred's family moved up here, they put out flowers. Behind their house on Route 37, the patch was all yellow. Another patch was all white. They had 11 lots over there where that big house was. He had those all in flowers, and they would even sometimes raise vegetables like Lima beans was one thing they would ship. When I married into the family, I started helping them with their flowers and loved working in those flowers. They were shipping them on the Illinois Central Railroad for several years. When the trains quit shipping them, Diss Trucking hauled them. When they would get enough to ship in Alma, they would call Fred's folks to get all they could get, and Diss would stop in Kinmundy to finish their truckload and go on to Chicago. As long as Fred's mother was living, she could pack those flowers beautifully. The box of those flowers was so pretty. After she passed away, he couldn't get along too good packing them, and I was working and I couldn't help too much. He quit shipping then. I'd pick those flowers there on 37 before I went to work. I'd get up real early and pick those flowers, and then he liked to sit out there and sell them. He couldn't bend over to pick them because he was getting older by then, but he helped as long as he could. When he died, Fred and I inherited the property. Then I kept working on it. I didn't ship very many. I could do better selling on the highway. There was no expense. There was so much expense to shipping to Chicago. I did that for years until I was in my 80's. Helen and Louis O'Dell had told me they would like to buy when I decided to sell so I sold it to them to them and they built their house there and enjoyed it. They lived there 10 or 12 years.

Through the years, I planted daffodils on the hill by my house. They came from a lot of different places. When Fred's sister and husband lived in the big house on 37, I asked about the white narcissus. They said I could have some because they were

digging them up anyway. They brought me a bushel of them, and I put two rows of white narcissus. I still have them. This hill out here, first it's yellow and then it's white. Fred would get out in a wheelchair even and try to put out bulbs. He wanted flowers on that hill. I just kept putting out more each year until I've got it clear down practically covered. I love them."