

Mary Getts Winks
An Alma Story
November 2016

Mary Getts Winks is used to mistakes in her identity. She was born on February 13, 1917, but her birth certificate said she was a boy born on February 1. When she was about 12, the birth certificate was changed to say she was a girl, but she still has to use the wrong date on official documents to agree with the birth certificate. The confusion doesn't end there. When she married, she became Mary Winks. Her husband's sister was also Mary Winks. Even after her sister-in-law's marriage and becoming Mary Winks Weeks, people confused the two. When this happened, Mary Getts Winks would wink at the person. She still has that cute trademark wink and a wonderful story she shared about her life in Alma.

Mary was born in Salem and attended Central School and Oak Park School where she was a part of the first high school band which included 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. She played alto horn and fondly remembers playing for sporting events and summer concerts on the courthouse steps. Familiar names of members of the first band are Dr. Nesbith, Attorney John Murray, Charles and Laura Roberts, and Drummer Norman Hanes who later was Salem High School band director.

Her father was a fireman and engineer on a steam engine train for the C&EI Railroad. As a benefit of the job, the family could ride the train without charge. Mary has fond memories of riding the train to Chicago to visit relatives living in Harvey. This all changed with the Depression and layoffs for the railroad. When she was in 8th grade, the family moved to Alma where she finished 8th grade and the two years offered by Alma High School. The spring of 8th grade, Mary remembers kids being out of school to pick daffodils. The women sorted the flowers with 25 in a bunch, secured them with rubber bands and put them in big flower boxes headed by train and truck to Chicago, Decatur, Champaign, and St. Louis. Everybody had daffodils because that was the way they could earn money to pay their taxes. Mary's mother drove to Salem

daily to work at Yohe's Laundry. Mary rode with her mother for her junior year at Salem High School. However, it was too early in the morning for Mary, and she quit school after six weeks.

Mary's Grandmother Dugan lived in Alma and shared her home with Mary's family and Mary's uncle. Mrs. Dugan owned a neighborhood grocery store that made her a living. Mary's dad and uncle planted a huge garden, and the family did a lot of canning to provide food. They had no refrigerator so perishable items were hung in the well, and meat was cured and kept in the smokehouse. When ice was delivered, it was wrapped in tow sacks and left in the yard. At that time, Alma had a few streetlights. The uncle wired the Dugan home with droplights hanging from the ceiling.

When Mary was 18, she married Andy Winks, and he joined the family at Grandma Dugan's house for two weeks until the newly weds could acquire household furnishings. The County Clerk performed the wedding ceremony at the Marion County Courthouse. Even though the wedding was a surprise, by evening their friends and relatives gathered for a chivaree. After gaining the family's attention with loud screaming and noisemakers, the guests were treated to candy from Grandma's grocery store. No honeymoon followed. Two or three years later they drove to Champaign to take a load of fruit and called that their honeymoon.

Mary and Andy rented his aunt's house. Dr. Schoonover from Salem delivered their first baby there. The labor lasted three days, and Dr. Schoonover even spent one night sleeping on the couch to be there for the birth. After the baby was a few months old, they moved to her aunt's big house. The aunt lived upstairs, and Mary's family lived downstairs. About five years later, a fire destroyed her aunt and uncle's house. Mary's family bought a house with five acres. It had a summerhouse in back so the aunt and uncle who had lost their home moved into the summerhouse. In 1968, Mary and Andy built a new house on their property, which she recently sold to Alma Mayor Russell Swift.

Mary's second baby was delivered at home, but by the time of the birth of her third child, Salem Hospital had opened a maternity ward on June

1, and she delivered a son there on June 19. Her fourth child was also born at Salem Hospital. Now the family includes 12 grandchildren and 16 great grandchildren. To see a lovely family picture taken on Mary's 90th birthday, go to the family picture section of kinmundyhistoricalsociety.org.

There were lots of peach, apple, and pear orchards around Alma. The men picked the fruit, and the women sorted it. The Winks family had an orchard where individuals could pick their own. The rest were sold at Winks Market along Route 37. For an orchard that shipped their fruit out of the area, Mary ring faced. That was a packing job whereby peaches were laid by hand inside a ring and placed at the top of the basket to look nice.

When the Texas Pipeline oil boom came to Alma, Mary's husband was hired as a pump station engineer. By then they had their own home. Housing was so scarce with the influx of workers that they rented out their upstairs to a family from Oklahoma. Businesses in Alma thrived including three grocery stores; three barber shops, two restaurants, filling stations, a blacksmith shop, and doctor's office. The grocery stores had dry goods for making clothes; they graded eggs and bought milk. They sold meat and food items—anything a family needed. Those general stores in Alma remind Mary of today's Wal-Mart.

Mary described the challenges of getting four children ready for church and then coming home to fry chicken and make noodles or dumplings and a chocolate pie for Sunday dinner. She made the piecrust with lard they made at butchering time. She commented that pies were never the same without lard they produced. Many times Mary's family would invite church friends or even the minister to join them for Sunday dinner.

Sunday wasn't the only challenging day for Mary. They owned five acres where they raised chickens, pigs, and a big garden. There were few modern conveniences. All of the water the family used was drawn from the well and carried into the house in buckets. When hot water was needed, it was heated on the stove. The stove was fueled by coal that had to be carried in from the coalhouse or wood, which had to be chopped and brought in from the woodpile. The fire had to be started

and maintained for cooking and keeping the water in the stove's reservoir hot. If the stove got too hot, the food burned. Mary's family had a bathtub with a pipe draining outside the house. After the tub was filled with hot water, the youngest child took a bath. Then they would add a little fresh water until the oldest was bathed. In the summer, the water would be heated outside in a wash boiler on bricks over an open fire. They kept a wash pan for hand washing. When Mary washed the clothes, she used a cradle washer. The clothes were put in the washer, and then they were agitated to clean by continuously pressing on the rocker under the washer. Then the clothes went through a hand turned ringer. They were rinsed in a tub, and then taken through the wringer again before being hung on the clothesline to dry. When dry, they were pressed with heavy irons that were heated on the stove.

Mary has been a widow for 30 years. She is a lovely lady with a cheerful disposition and a variety of interests from observing wildlife out her cozy apartment window at Salem Woods to playing games and looking at family pictures on her iPad to reminiscing about her long time association with the Red Hat Society. At the time of this interview, she was looking forward to entertaining family on Thanksgiving at Alma Christian Church.