

COX, Madelin (Cullom)

Submitted by granddaughter Debbie (Erdevig) Schleiffer

COX – Madelin was born on March 26, 1908 and raised in Toulon, Illinois. Madelin and her husband Ray Cox had four children before they split up. She worked hard as a young mother after Ray left. Her mother, Bessie (Parrish Cullom) Draper helped the family. Later, another marriage to Thomas Lawler of Springfield, Illinois also failed.

After the children were grown and married, Madelin experienced a sensational event that proved to be a turning point. While sitting on a bench at a bus stop, an inner voice told her to stand up and move. She got up and moved. Moments later a car collided with the bench killing several patrons. To her, it was a sign that she commit her life to giving back.

In 1959, Madelin took her little granddaughter, Karon Kane, as she traveled to New York City to gain permission from the Catholic archdiocese to become a nun. Not approved, the 56-year old grandmother of 15 instead became an international missionary. She served in the very poorest slums of Concepcion, Chile teaching life skills to mothers with babies. Every six months she made the arduous return trip to Illinois to renew her visa. She remembered sleeping with a broken wine bottle under her bed to defend herself against opposing establishments. When the massive earthquake of 1960 devastated Chile, Madelin was there to help.

In 1963, the Catholics for Latin America produced their monthly magazine with Madelin on the cover as their lead story chronicling her missionary achievements, her “remarkable wisdom, understanding of human nature and her practical common sense.” Her letters home always reflected deep love for family, but she stated she was accomplishing more good in Concepcion.

At one point, she decided to meet the Pope at the Vatican in Rome. She saved her pennies and traveled by steam freighter to Europe to sightsee and gain audience with Pope Paul VI which impressed her immensely.

Then it was on to life with youngest daughter Carol Jean (Cox) Kvitkauskas and her six children in Orlando, Florida. Or the gypsy traveler from Toulon could be found in Tarpon Springs, Florida where she became an accomplished medical transcriber.

Sadly, Madelin began suffering from breast cancer. So she enjoyed some final years above a cheese making shop in San Juan del Rio, Mexico. Giving back, she taught English to the local post master and pharmacist. In 1974 health issues forced her to return, so daughter Marilyn Bess (Cox) Kane and granddaughter Karon drove down to pick her up.

After surgery, she continued to live at Marilyn’s house in Mount Prospect, Illinois. Karon remembers those years vividly as she’d sneak past her grandma’s bedroom door but was always caught and called to cross stitch. Madelin was a fine seamstress and her framed cross stitches are still enjoyed today.

Sometimes living near her daughters Marilyn or Margaret Ann (Cox) Erdevig near Elgin, Illinois, Madelin bounced from family to family as they loved her to the end. She died in Mount Prospect, Illinois on May 6, 1976. Madelin donated her body to research as her final act of giving back.

Photo: Madelin (Cullom Cox) Lawler

