

# FERN'S CHILDREN'S MEMORIES

*Fern Whitmer*



## GARY MUNN

Born November 28, 1951

Died December 6, 2018

Trips to Arizona, flash floods. The water from the flash floods would come so fast I can remember running water in the dips where we were driving. One time the car stalled when Uncle Lawrence was with us. Then ... desert hot, car broke down, Indians.

I remember sitting at the bus station with Mom on a trip to Safford. I felt safe that Mom could do anything that any adult could do. My Mom could do anything!!!

I liked to go to Arizona with Mom. Stay in Grandma's house. I can still smell it, hear Billy, her blue parakeet, the shadows, go to Aunt Mary's. Almost kill Uncle Alton as he tried to teach me at 7 or 8 to drive a stick shift pick up. Uncle Alton would say, "You're gonna kill me. You're gonna kill me" when I would pop the clutch during our driving lessons. He would throw bales of hay off the trailer to the cows, then see a calf being born breach and went into Mary's house screaming in tears "the cow is turning inside out."

Mom and I would send Grandma Whitmer letters and there would always be a surprise in Grandma's letter or card to us like a stick of gun, picture or charm. Going to Arizona, Mom and Dad telling us kids that if we weren't good they would give us away to the Indians. Going to El Paso and Juarez. Mom and Dad dealing with the local shops and leather purses and goods. "Let's go and Jew them down."

Mom pointing out in the TIME magazine our cousin, Van. (I had stayed at their home when they lived in Morenci.) There were nine pictures of the boys from the high school foot ball team. They had all joined the army, went to Viet Nam and each and everyone of them killed in action (KIA). I can still see and wonder about him, his buddies and all of the families pain and grief. (eight members of the senior class and one was a year older).

## CHERYL JANE MUNN

My mother used to tell me that her mother Grandma Whitmer, would go out in the woods in Alpine where she could cry because of the female problems she had. She never had a doctor for any of her 17 babies. In fact, when my mother was born, Aunt Faye was born first and Mom said that sometime later, out popped Mom, a complete surprise. Grandma never knew she was having twins before that. About three years later she had another set of twins, that died sometime around birth. Seventeen children had been born.

Grandma liked to make quilts when her children were growing up, and made a quilt for all 65 grandchildren. She and her friends would get together for quilting bees once a week.

### **Here's some info about quilting bees:**

"The most romantic view of a quilting bee is that of the quilting party. Old books and

stories tell of neighbors all being invited to a quilting. The women would quilt all day, perhaps taking turns around the frame while others cooked up the grand meal that would be served to the menfolk that evening.

Many a “quilting” or quilting bee included only women helping a friend or neighbor finish a quilt. Such a feminine gathering would be a great way for women to get together to socialize. Women could share family news, exchange recipes, give child-rearing tips and all in all support each other. It has been said that next to church going quilting bees were the primary contact for women. But even this view has been romanticized a bit.” (Taken from America’s Quilting History-Gathering Around the Frame -the Quilting Bee)

Grandma was never called Sarah after she was married. The legend has it that Angus didn’t want to call her the same name as her mother so he started calling her “Jennie.” I am named after Grandma, Cheryl Jane. My daughter is Jennifer Michelle nicknamed Jennie just like Grandma. Her daughter is Sarah Jane, named after Grandma. The reason I started writing family history books is because Jennie thought about naming her first daughter after Grandma Sarah Jane “Jennie” Whitmer. She asked for some stories about Grandma so I began the search in my many cardboard boxes all the genealogy and family history I had been collecting since I was ten yearsold. I found the history Jennie wanted. The result is history. It was the first book I wrote “Munn and Whitmer Family History”, in 1997.

### **Memories of Safford:**

Behind Grandma’s little house was a littler house, just one bed room, almost the size of a tool shed. I remember it being so so hot in the summer. When we opened the

door you felt like you had been hit with a thunderous heat wave that was almost unbearable. No air conditioning. Yet, it provided one more bed for company.

When we would go to see Grandma from California we would arrive in the middle of the night when it was dark. I can still remember the sweet smell of cantaloupes she would cut up for us.

Grandpa was having a water fight using a hose, of course, but not sure who else was in this famous Whitmer water fight. My mother loved water fights and so did her family. One time I vividly remember the absolute shock of seeing Grandpa take the hose into the house during the water fight. I bet Grandma was mad!

I stayed with Grandma Whitmer one summer when I was about eleven years-old. While I was there I asked her to tell me her life story so I wrote it while she dictated her story. When Grandma told me her ‘life story’ she told about her family living the United Order. Her parents were the Judds and Lewis’.

“The Mormon immigrants were called by the Church authorities to come to Arizona to colonize it. They arrived in the early spring of about 1882. When the family of Don Carolos Judd and Mary Ellen Lewis with their two young daughters reached the United Order, people pooled their possessions. They proceeded to share, work, have hospitality and all things pertaining to the United Order. However, the Judds and Lewis’ could tell things wouldn’t work out for them ... They traveled to another place ending up in Smithville changed to Pima.” This story is Grandma’s exact words in her autobiography in my first book “Munn and Whitmer Family History” written in 1997. Hallmark made a movie that included internment camps in the movie titled “The Magic of Ordinary Days” one of my favorites, directed by Vice President of Hallmark, Brad Moore, my dear Munn/Moore cousin.)

“United orders” refers to the cooperative enterprises established in LDS communities of the Great Basin,

Mexico, Arizona, and Canada during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in an effort to better establish ideal Christian community and group economic self-sufficiency. The roots go back to Joseph Smith's 1831 revelations outlining the law of consecration and stewardship as the foundation for the ideal community. Economic goals of consecration included relative income equality, group self-sufficiency, and the elimination of poverty.

Under this plan, the head of each family would consecrate or deed all real and personal property to the Presiding Bishop of the Church and would receive, in turn, a stewardship, or "inheritance," from consecrated property. Thereafter, Church members would consecrate annually all surplus production from their stewardships to the bishop's storehouse. This system functioned briefly in a few LOS communities in the Midwest during the 1830s; in the Great Basin, Church members prepared deeds of consecration in 1855-1858, but they were never acted upon." (Encyclopedia of Mormonism, BYU Library)

The only problem with the story she told me, was that it ended telling of her birth. I lost her life story at that time!

I remember the summer I spent with Grandma in her small house in Safford. It was just Grandma and me as Grandpa had passed on. One night Grandma and I were sitting on her back door stoop. We were listening to all the noise next door where there was a lot of drinking going on. That was the first time I had ever smelled liquor. A lot of yelling and fighting going on. We were going to get a gun to protect ourselves but we didn't have one. That was memory that left smells and sounds and even fear with me.

I remember sleeping with Grandma in her small bedroom. She would tell me stories when we were in bed including stories about ancestors coming to visit her. She prefaced it with, most people would not believe her but I did. After all she was old and

the likelihood of her dead family visiting her, made perfect sense to me.

Grandpa and Grandma's wedding picture was on the wall next to the door that led to the living room. It was reassuring that the entire family had been sealed in the temple. I greatly treasure that picture which I inherited. It is hanging prominently on my Ancestral Wall.

That summer Grandma said something to me that I'll never forget. "Whatever you do, you have to lock the bedroom door!" That left me wondering just what she meant. Smells. Her tiny bathroom. Her kitchen. Always cooking. The musky smell. Grandma laughing and talking. Tending her flowers around her home. Hearing the chirping of Billy, her blue parakeet which is why I usually have had a parakeet. Watching her cinch up her corset. I've never seen one before or since. Fascinating. Still, it looked painful to wear. I only other time I saw a corset being cinched, was on the movie "Gone with the Wind."

Grandma used to talk about the polygamist in Safford. A man had married two sisters but they hated each other. The houses were attached by the living room in the middle. It was scandalous!

#### **Other memories:**

Grandpa and Grandma would come visit us in California. I can still see Grandpa leaning over in their bedroom and Grandpa yelling at her. Grandma had to give him insulin shots every day for his diabetes. Yes, many Whitmers have diabetes.

My mother would always say if we were bad, she was going to sell us or give us away to the Indians. Other cousins have told me their mothers threatened them too. Alpine is in Apache county and it wasn't unusual to see Apaches around Alpine. Many often came begging at Grandma's door. She was always generous and gave them food.

Mom talked about when they lived in Parker, Arizona.

I remember it being very dry and hot. You must remember that my mother, Fem Whitmer Munn, was the youngest child (# 15) and the only child home at that time. She told me about Grandpa being hired at the Internment Camp for the Japanese during World War II. It was a big deal to her but I knew very little of what that meant.

### **Here's some information I found on the internet about the camps:**

Japanese internment camps were established during World War II by President Franklin Roosevelt through his Executive Order 9066. From 1942 to 1945, it was the policy of the U.S. government that people of Japanese descent would be interred in isolated camps. Enacted in reaction to Pearl Harbor and the ensuing war, the Japanese internment camps are now considered one of the most atrocious violations of American civil rights in the 20th century.

As Grandma got older when she came to see us in California, she would often walk out the door without us knowing because of her dementia. It was always a worry as all of us tried to find her.

Grandma used to sing to her children and her grandchildren a lot. So did my mother. I've included some of the songs they would sing in this book, at least some of them. I sang them to my grandchildren. One time I was singing the song "Two Little Children" about two children whose parents died. While I was singing it to my grandsons, my four year-old grandson, Josh Cox, kicked me on my shin and told me to quit singing the song because it was made him sad!

When my mother was about 35 years-old she woke up in the middle of the night and saw her dad, Grandpa Whitmer, in the closet (don't ask me why, but dead people often show up in closets.) It was fortuitous. Mom had some unresolved issues with her father that caused her a great deal of sadness. When she saw her

dad, he was a changed man and all the anger she had felt was gone, forever.

### **A more recent memory:**

I knew of people who did genealogy like me who saw dead people. I wanted to see my ancestors so I started praying I would see my dead ancestors. If other people could see their dead, so should I!

A few weeks later while living in Murray, Utah, I had a poignant dream that Grandma and I were together getting ready to go on a train trip together. We were so excited. Grandma went to change her clothes for the trip and came back wearing a suit and pill box hat. Later, I felt that was so exciting that I saw Grandma in a dream.

The next night I was in the garage taking some groceries from the car into the house in when I heard Grandma talking. Well, I had just talked to her the night before so I certainly knew her voice. I looked around and saw that her voice was coming out of my iPhone. So I went in the house, set my groceries down, and sat at the kitchen bar.

I listened to the taped interview that Keith David Whitmer had made in 1958 with Grandma. I had transcribed it into my family history book, but not all of it. As I listened I felt bad I hadn't transcribed the whole thing. (The tape recording is on Family Search under Grandma's name.)

When the interview was over, I looked around and couldn't see Grandma but I said out loud, "Grandma, I know that you're here. And now I know that you're one of my Guardian Angels." Then I picked up the phone and called my daughter, Jennie, to tell her about what had just happened. She enthusiastically said, "Well, did you tell her that Sarah Jane (her namesake and granddaughter) is going to her first

Homecoming tonight?" I said, "Yes, but she already knew!!"

### **Another memory of Grandma:**

Several months later, I had just left my home at about 6 in the morning to join my girlfriend for a hike. I turned on the car radio. For some reason I turned it back in reverse, and when I did, I could hear Grandma's voice. It was the same interview with Grandma again, only this time I could hear her singing familiar songs in her wonderful, high pitched voice." By the time I had reached my friend's house, I shushed her and told my friend what was going on. I sat in her driveway crying. Once more Grandma had come to comfort me. She wanted me to know she was there for me. I could still hear the interview and singing for weeks after that! Yes, it seemed a little eerie but I've been hearing from my ancestors who have passed, off and on for years, so I wasn't that surprised.

My mother used to tell me that the Hamblins who lived in Alpine used to make fun of the Whitmers because they had such a large family. They didn't like the Hamblins. It has been a tradition for me and other cousins, that whenever we went to Alpine, we went to the cemetery. The dirt was high above the graves

which were usually decorated with colorful flowers. That's how graves were decorated in the past but not now. We always noted Jacob Hamlin's grave. He was a famous missionary to the Indians. I still didn't like him for how he treated my mother's family!

When Grandma told me her 'life story' she told about her family living the United Order. Her parents were the Judds (and Lewis') and were asked to colonize Central Arizona. They joined the United Order, and this is their experience according to Grandma.

"The Mormon immigrants were called by the Church authorities to come to Arizona to colonize it. They arrived in the early spring of about 1882. When the family of Don Carolos Judd and Mary Ellen Lewis with their two young daughters reached the United Order, people pooled their possessions. They proceeded to share, work, have hospitality and all things pertaining to the United Order. However, the Judds and Lewis' could tell things wouldn't work out for them ... They traveled to another place ending up in Smithville changed to Pima." This story is Grandma's exact words in her autobiography in my first book "Munn and Whitmer Family History" written in 1997.

