

DEBBIE WHITMER FOR VON

Von B. Whitmer



Debbie tells that although my parents didn't go to church, they always welcomed the Home Teachers and missionaries. They had a Home Teacher for years who came regularly. He took her dad to the VA Hospital one time and Von gave him some money for gas. The home teacher gave the money to the church under my dad's name.

My dad changed his name from Vaughn to Von later in life. I'm not sure if he did it legally but I know he preferred it.

I have heard the following story from family members like Uncle Rex and Aunt Fern. One of the worst times came when my dad was driving truck for Grandpa Whitmer. He picked up a gal hitchhiking. After meeting her several times, they ran away and got married. Some say that he may have been bragging about his family's big ranch and farm, and that she might have been after his 'money.' My grandparents had the marriage annulled. It was an unhappy time. Aunt Fern often thought it was the wrong thing to do as he loved her. Aunt Fern was his youngest sister and he was the youngest son. She and Dad were always close and it broke her heart because he drank so much. She called him often. While Melvin and Fern were on their mission in Sikeston, Missouri, they came to visit my parents.

Dad wasn't the only one who drank in his family. Most of the boys drank and smoked. The Word of Wisdom wasn't enforced until later. Later, the boys mostly gave it up. I understand that there were three alcoholics and they were all heavy drinkers: Dad, Aunt Genevieve and Aunt Ethel. Only Aunt Ethel was able to give it up later

in life. She became active in the church and loved to say how much she enjoyed Relief Society.

It has been said that Dad joined up with the military as he was upset after his parents broke up his marriage. He joined the Army Air Corp, now Air Force, as a telegrapher in World War II. According to Rex Whitmer, Jr. He flew the Burma Hump from India to China where they were dropping supplies to the Chinese. Many Americans died flying the Burma Hump. My dad was very brave.

One time my dad's Home Teacher brought a man from Burma or India. Debbie doesn't know who he was but the crazy thing is that her dad spoke the language with him, Burmese or Indian. She had no idea he knew another language. When she asked him about it, he laughed. This is the first time she saw him laugh. He said, "All the family knew I could speak another language." She also saw him laugh out loud when he was watching an episode of 'All in the Family.'

Debbie remembers they never had much fun in their home. So much drinking that often led to abusive behaviors. They made me do things like shoplift. My mother suffered from the effects of alcoholism by my dad. When I was twelve years-old my father was sober. He took prescription pills for a disability but they had a dopey effect on him. When I was eighteen years-old he started drinking again although he was sober for three years before he died.

Through all my parent's drinking, I felt I became more tolerant, super responsible and a perfectionist. My mother, Zella, was co-dependent because of her drinking. Dad wouldn't take no for an answer and he often pushed alcohol on Mom. My dad was abusive to Zella both physically and mentally. He was an alcoholic most of his adult life.

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My parents adopted two children. The first child adopted was Lavaughn Elaine known as Susie who was born August 13, 1949 in Indianapolis, Indiana. She died July 19, 1952 of polio while the family was in Alpine, Arizona. At the same time Susie died, Uncle Harold's son, James Harold, two years-old, drank kerosene and died in Alpine too. Uncle Harold, Dad, Uncle Ralph and Uncle Don used the sawmill owned by Uncle Don to make coffins for Dad and Uncle Harold's children. Not only did they need them for their children but apparently there were others who had died recently possibly from polio. Also there was also a man going through Alpine pulling out tonsils and some people died from the anesthesia. It is said that something broke inside Dad when he lost his little girl.

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I remember when the family stayed with Uncle Rex and Aunt Claire for one month. Dad got a good job as deputy sheriff of Greenlee County, Arizona, guarding the mines and patrolling. During this month the I went to church and enjoyed it, a first for me. It must have took because I became active in the church later in life and loved attending church.

Fourteen years later my parents decided to adopt again. I was adopted in Indianapolis, Indiana, having been born March 30, 1966. My parents took me home two days later.

Now proud to say that I'm a nurse, and have a daughter and also granddaughter, Mavis Zella.

Dad died June 3, 1992. Aunt Fern flew there hoping to see him before he died but he died six hours before she got there. She did make it to the funeral. He died of lung and skin cancer.

This is Cheryl Jane. I am adding some memories about Uncle Yon by his nephew, David Keith Whitmer, who has since passed to the great beyond.

"In my mind's eye I see myself as a young boy. Uncle Yon was my idol. I tagged along wherever he went. I see us chasing and catching chipmunks in the willows in the upper and lower pasture. In another memory picture. we are in Von's room at the old Whitmer homestead in Alpine, Arizona looking at his collection of Indian arrows. He let me shoot his 22 rine loaded with bird shot instead of a slug.

When WW II came along Yon went to war and our family moved to Phoenix. Yon was handsome with wavy dark hair. I have pictures of him in his military uniform. I received picture post cards from him when he was stationed somewhere in the south."