



Fern's Siblings





ANGUS DON WHITMER

February 28, 1903 - April 6, 1977



Historical Profile

Angus Don Whitmer was born on 28 February 1903 in Pima, Arizona. He was the first of 17 children born to Angus Vanmeter (24) and Jennie Whitmer (17). Thirteen of those children - eight boys and five girls, lived to adulthood. One brother Lealand Claude died of whooping cough on 8 August 1906. Another brother Ray V, who had been born in 1915, died of pneumonia on 3 May 1917. The last set of twin girls, Bertha and Blanche, died around birth.

According to David Keith Whitmer the Whitmer children were raised, "in the lousy rugged and amazingly beautiful White Mountains of Alpine, Arizona where the mountains reach 8,000 feet in the sky of Neverland. Alpine is now a resort but in the early 1900s it was a very small place where farmers raised their cattle, vegetables and did whatever it took to feed their families. The Whitmer children knew the Blue well, a place where the cattle grazed in the winter. All the children were raised riding horses. It was a place where everyone had to work and work hard. Seventeen children were born here. Four died.

The year of "Don"'s birth, as he was known to family and friends, brought news of Orville and Wilbur Wright successfully designing and flying the world's first human piloted aircraft. Within a few short decades the invention of the modern airplane would completely revolutionize life, travel, and war for the people of his lifetime.

Two years his younger, Don's future wife, Conda Cox Jensen was born 1100 miles to the north in Grant Montana in 1905.

The year after Don's birth his siblings began to be born. Brother Ralph came in 1904. Then Lealand Claude was born in 1906 and reportedly died at the age of 7 of pneumonia or diphtheria. Cecil was born in 1907, and then Harold in 1909 when Don was 6. Chuck was born in 1910, and then his first sister, Genevieve, was born in 1912, the same year as the sinking of the Titanic in the North Atlantic Ocean. Ethel was born in 1914 as World War 1 was beginning, and Ray was born the following year in 1915. Since he was in his

young teen years, Don was not deeply impacted by the war. A brother named Afton was born in 1917, and then Ray died that same year of the whooping cough. The next year in 1918 Lawrence was born.

Don spent his earliest years in Arizona's Gila Valley but the family moved to a homestead in Alpine, Arizona in 1920 which became the "family home." It was here that Don developed a deep love for the mountains. When 17 another sister, Mary, was born into the family. Then Vaughn was born when he was 19 in 1922. Three years later twins Faye and Fern were born to his mother. These would be the last of the living children. Blanche and Bertha would die at birth in 1928.

Don's family were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and according to his younger sister Fern's account, "Church and religion was our whole life. We all got up and went to Church. I don't know if I learned a lot. My parents were so busy I wasn't given much time. Church and Sunday School on Sunday, Relief Society and Mutual on Tuesdays, Primary Wednesdays. Dances on the weekends. Family prayer sometimes around my parents' bed."

In his early manhood, he accepted a call to serve as a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He was the only son who served a mission. He became an ardent student of the scriptures and developed as a teacher and public speaker.

It was also in the mission field where he met a young convert, Conda Jensen. Their relationship grew into a romance. Following his missionary service, they were married in the beautiful Arizona Temple on December 23, 1927. Their home was blessed with three children who became their pride and joy. The first child, Geraldine, was born in Tacoma, Washington in 1929. The second, David Keith and the third, Neldon J. were both born in Alpine, Arizona in 1931 and 1933.

These young, married, family-building years were during the Great Depression and were no doubt a struggle for all as they worked to meet life's demands and maintain their family time. Don and Conda built a two-story log home on their portion of the Whitmer homestead. Don was the oldest of the seventeen children. As a boy Grandpa Whitmer and Don cut, cured and notched the pine logs. With his one-man sawmill, he cut lumber and even milled the shingles for the home. Grandpa cut the timber off several Alpine ranches before big sawmills came to town. Don was an artist, author, and a legendary hunter, tracker and trapper.

When he was 36 years old Europe entered into a second world war. Five years later the United States would enter that war and join the Allied forces in



Geraldine, Neldon, and Keith

defeating the Nazi Regime and the Japanese Empire in their attempts to take over the world. Don was 42 when the Atomic Bomb was dropped and news eventually came that the war was ending.

The subsequent years brought more trials as the U.S. entered into additional military conflicts. Don's son Nelden was wounded in the Korean war. He was discharged because his wound was thought to be eventually fatal. He nevertheless healed, married and lived until the age of 71.

1955 brought the death of Don's father Angus Vanmeter at the age of 76. He was living in Safford, Arizona at the time.

Four years later, Conda died in 1959 after an extended battle with cancer. They were divorced at the time.

In 1960 Don married Virginia Beatrice Snell Van Sant and began a special relationship in which they shared many interests and hobbies. Their years together were special years of companionship and devotion to each other.

His mother passed away in 1967 at the age of 83.

The last decade of his life brought some remarkable advances in technology and quality of living. When Don was 66 years old he watched on television as the first man in human history landed and stepped onto the moon. The next year his sister Genevieve would die. Then 7 years later on 6 April 1977 Angus Don Whitmer passed away in Sacramento California at the age of 74.

One way to know a man is by his occupation. Don's work experience included fence and road building, farming and ranching, trapping, lumbering, supervisor in aircraft industry, real estate broker, etc. He excelled at whatever he did and was held in highest esteem by those he worked with.

Don was an artist, author, storyteller and poet in his own right. He left behind a legacy of pen sketches, poetry, numerous songs and other writings.

Pioneer Cabin

*Little Log Cabin of long ago,
Bravely weathering rain or snow.
Peacefully basking in summer sun,
Gradually turning from gray to dun.*

*Worn old logs of yesterday
Falling apart in slow decay:
Door ajar, windows wide;
Seeming to beckon me inside.*

*When your sagging roof and sod were new,
And your logs were strong and your beams were true;
And the dusty stones of your hearth were bright,
With the dancing gleam of your fire-light,*

*When the windows were hung with curtains gay
And spotless panes caught the sun's first rays.
Did you nearly burst with joy and pride,
With the warmth and glow of life inside.*

*Did your floors resound with the echo sweet
Or happy patter of baby feet?
Or your sturdy walls, did they listen in,
On children's laughter and noisy din?*

*And what of her who was mistress here,
Did she love it all and hold it dear?
Was she brave and strong with courage true
In spite of the endless tasks to do?*

*Or sometimes perhaps, at the close of day,
when her noisy brood were tucked away;
Did she sit and sigh? Or didn't she mind,
The luxuries she had left behind?*

*I hope she was happy to make the best,
Of you, Little Log Cabin, out in the West.
Please, won't you speak? I'm sure you know;
Little Log Cabin of long ago.*

By -A.D. Whitmer (Angus Don)

Angus Don's son, David Keith Whitmer

David K. Whitmer's Articles

'Let me Count the Ways my Wife Sustains Me'

by David K. Whitmer

Several years ago, a Relief Society teacher asked for my help. She said, "President Whitmer, I'm teaching a lesson to help wives learn to support and sustain their husbands. You are a priesthood leader and a husband, and I know that your wife, Alice, supports and sustains you."

I couldn't argue with that so I said, "How can I be of help?" She then gave me a paper with the following assignment written on it: Please write down the thoughts that come to you when you read this statement: My wife supports and sustains me, let me count the ways.

This teacher indicated that she planned to share my response with the Relief Society sisters. I agreed to help, but I must confess I felt some discomfort and annoyance with another assignment in an already busy day. The assignment was a blessing in disguise, and proved to be a rewarding exercise for me and for Alice. I am hopeful that the twelve points I recorded will be instructive and helpful to all wives who want to grow in their capacity to become wise and loving wives.

This list is not complete nor did it take long to compile once I put my mind and heart into the task. My list reads as follows:

MY WIFE SUPPORTS AND SUSTAINS ME! LET ME COUNT THE WAYS

1. First of all by simply being herself with all facets of her personality which brings out a wide range of feelings in her husband, including delight, annoyance, love, curiosity, frustration, mystery, tenderness, and some feelings words have not been invented for.
2. My wife is able to sense when I need to talk and has developed the ability to listen and reflect my thoughts and feelings back to me without editorial comment. This allows me to examine my thoughts and feelings before acting on them.
3. My wife is warm and tender at appropriate times without being gushy or sickeningly sweet.
4. My wife is flexible enough to not be wiped out by an unexpected dinner guest.
5. My wife is able to function as a counselor, calling my attention to ideas, thoughts and especially feelings that often escape my attention.
6. My wife shares relevant ideas and articles she has read, thus keeping me informed in areas that are most helpful.
7. My wife respects the priesthood and shows it by making it easy for me to fulfill Church assignments.
8. My wife is able to make me feel that I come first in her life, even before the children, relatives and friends.
9. My wife loves our children but can also admit that there are days when she would turn in her "mommie badge" for a nickel.
10. My wife gets us up early enough for us to have breakfast and family prayer before the kids go to seminary. (This is an area of sacrifice for her.)
11. My wife helps me find resources for my writing and teaching and she often teams with me in giving workshops and fireside talks.

12. Lastly, my wife helps me feel that she accepts me and loves me just as I am, yet is not bashful or secretive about communicating that there are things that I do that she has difficulty accepting or understanding or both.

This exercise had a profound effect on me. It helped me see in print how much I take for granted, and my love and appreciation increased as I realized what a wise and loving wife Alyce had become. My list was read to the sisters without mention of who had written it. I think it did something for Alyce when, about half-way through, it dawned on her who had written the list.

I suggest that this would be an excellent exercise for all husbands. My witness to you is that it will help you love and appreciate your wife more than ever. If you share it with her, it can help her feel loved, needed and appreciated. It may even be the catalyst to help her become more wise and loving as a wife.

What Husbands Expect

There are other ways that wives can learn what husbands need and expect of wives. The article that my wife and I wrote for "Mormon Life" last month reported the results of a survey showing "What Wives Expect of Husbands." You wives may be interested in reading Dr. Barlow's follow-up book. He calls it What Husbands Expect of Wives (Deseret Book Company).

This book reports the results of a survey of over 300 husbands listing and ranking their top ten expectations. Wives may want to see what they can learn from this survey.

Profile of a Loving Wife

These are the ten most important items (in rank order) indicated by husbands in the Deseret News and marriage seminar surveys:

1. She expresses her love both by word and action.
2. She helps me attain my spiritual needs.
3. She supports me in my endeavors both at home and at work.
4. She gives our children adequate emotional and physical care.
5. She helps me attain sexual satisfaction in our relationship.
6. She communicates effectively both by listening and by speaking.
7. She keeps our home reasonably clean and free from excessive clutter.
8. She is patient with me and does not nag or complain excessively.
9. She has high self-esteem.
10. She is aware that her appearance and physical fitness affect how I feel toward her.

It is interesting to compare the above profile with the Profile of a Loving Husband given in last month's article. Number one on the wives' expectations had to do with communication. Communication was number six on the men's list of expectations. "She helps me attain sexual satisfaction" is number five on the men's list and it appears as number ten on the wives' list. Husbands and wives could grow in understanding by reviewing and discussing these two profiles. Dr. Barlow's books have a great deal of valuable information that could be used as a springboard to growth and understanding.

Differences Between Men and Women

Wives often need to be taught the differences between men and women. Too often, we just assume that the other understands. When we make this naive assumption, we will be wrong at least 50 percent of the time. In a most provocative audio cassette tape, Dr. Charles Beckart tells "What Husbands Wish Their Wives knew About Men." (Covenant Recording, Inc.). Dr. Beckart lists and discusses the following six different areas between husbands and wives:

1. Men and women differ in their primary source of self-esteem. Men tend to get esteem needs met outside the home, usually through their work. Women's needs for esteem are more readily fulfilled within the home and family. This is the source of much frustration in the marriage relationship.
2. Men tend to live segmented lives. They seem able to separate the various parts of their lives into individual compartments which can be almost mutually exclusive. It seems more natural for women to live life as an integrated whole. What affects one part of her life will likely contaminate the whole. This can influence everything from the kitchen sink to the bedroom.
3. Men and women often differ in expectations related to sexuality. For most men, sex can be a separate activity while for most women, sex grows out of the whole relationship. Men are visually stimulated. This does not seem to be a prime source of stimulation for most women.
4. Husbands and wives often differ in their capacity to pick up subtle clues. Men are not good at mind reading. They want to please wives but seem unable to guess what will please her. Assumptions are wrong more often than not. Women seem more adept at this than men.

5. A psychological "double-bind" is created when women try to tell husbands to be the leader. Dr. Beckart maintains that a man cannot lead when told to do so by his wife. He calls this the "Lead me, Ralph, Syndrome."

6. Women seem to use the right side of their brain more than the left side. Men tend to depend more on the left hemisphere of the brain. Women tend to be more creative and intuitive while men pride themselves in rational and factual matters.

It would seem important that helpful husbands and wise wives would learn to accept, appreciate and take full advantage of any differences they find. If husbands and wives were just alike, one would be superfluous. Differences potentially allow each of you to see and be more than either can see or be alone. Differences seen in this way, become a bonus instead of a battle ground.

Dr. Beckart's tape could become a great catalyst for growth. Couples would do well to make time to listen to it together with no outside interruptions. They should stop the tape whenever either wants to share or question.

In conclusion, we do not become helpful husbands or wise and loving wives by accident. We must have a commitment to growth. The best place to grow is in our own home laboratory. It is hoped that you will use the resources suggested in this article as tools for growth together. New skills can best be developed with coaching and practice. You can learn much from each other if you are candid in sharing expectations. Be fully responsible for your own behavior and choose to give to each other in love. In doing so, may you become the helpful and loving husbands and the wise and loving wives that each of you deserve.

TOMORROW IS PROMISED

Surviving the Death of a Child

In January I received an ominous telephone call. “Hello, Keith? This is Aunt Mary calling. I’m afraid I have sad news. Your cousin William, is dead. He climbed on his roof to repair a chimney. Somehow he fell, hitting his head on the concrete patio. He never regained consciousness.”

This news brought numbness followed by a flood of feelings. I was too shocked to ask for details. William is my cousin, more accurately, my double cousin. His father is my father’s younger brother and his mother is my mother’s younger sister. I feel more bonded to this family than to any of my relatives.

When I called to express my sorrow and sympathy, tears erupted from somewhere deep inside my soul and I wept without shame. This is the second son who has preceded them in death. Their other son, Van, was killed in Vietnam and now William is gone.

I knew from personal experience the helpless, hopeless feelings that overwhelm a parent at the death of a son or daughter. Just five years ago, our own family lived through the nightmare of losing two daughters in a tragic traffic accident.

The lessons of life are not always easy to learn, but I have learned that in this life “tomorrow is promised to no one.” Even so, I have a strengthened witness that “families can be forever.” Yes, I know that, because of what happened at Easter-time, tomorrow is promised to those who believe in Christ. Yes, we are looking forward to the promised reunion with our daughters. Because of the promises of Easter, we now know that one can survive the death of a loved one.

The Bereaved Parent

When our girls were killed, a thoughtful friend suggested a book written by a parent who had lost a son in death. The book is “The Bereaved Parent” by Harriet Sarnoff Schiff. It became part of the answer to our prayers. After reading the book, we began to feel others could and did understand the hellish torment we were experiencing. In addition, the author offered hope of healing. She bore witness that we could live through the pain and choose to live our lives fully in spite of what happened. This was the ray of hope we desperately needed.

We now understand why we felt little comfort when friends tried to rescue us with well-worn platitudes. We felt these friends did not understand. On the other hand, when we were visited by those who had lost a son or daughter, we noted they did not try to comfort us. They seemed to know there was no comfort at this time. These friends didn’t stay long, instead they left after wordless but healing hugs. Their only comment was that they had learned time and faith helped in the healing. We felt they understood, and this was helpful and even comforting.

The book also helped us to understand that the death of a child leaves a deeper wound than any other death. I have buried both mother and father and survived quite well knowing this was inevitable. However, my parents’ deaths did not prepare me for the parade of unanswerable “why” questions that haunted every waking moment for months. These thoughts still sneak through when we least expect them.

The Hurting and Healing

When my cousin died, I chose to fly to Arizona to be with the family. I felt they might need an experienced guide to lead them through the swamp of suffering that engulfs us when we bury loved ones. It was the right thing to do and it was appreciated.

I have come to know and recognize the predictable stages of the grieving process. They include: (1) The initial numbness that allows the body to withstand the shock. (2) There are periods of denial in which we attempt to convince ourselves that it didn't really happen. We pretend it is only a bad dream, a nightmare that will disappear when we wake up. We never do. (3) There are periods of both inner and outer anger brought on by unanswerable "why" questions. (4) We experience "bargaining" stages in which we vainly attempt to undo what has happened by promising anything we own or ever hope to own to get the script rewritten. When our offer is unheard, we often either go back to number one or on to number five. (5) Number five can be called depression, or perhaps the "pity bucket" is a more appropriate term. Here we wallow in "why me" and "if only" until we can't stand it anymore. (6) Lastly, just when we think there is no hope, the "pity party" is called off and the healing or reconciliation begins. It is a case of "faith precedes the miracle" of healing.

I have come to believe that the hurting must precede and clear the way for the healing. I watched with empathetic understanding what happened with my cousin's parents. When the numbness wore off, the pain became intense. I wondered if they could withstand the never-ending parade of friends, the fatigue of the funeral and all else that goes with the death and burial of a loved one. As I watched, I gained a new witness that all of these things can be a helpful part of experiencing the hurt so we can make way for the healing.

In our own experience, the turning point came when my wife, Alyce, announced through tears, "I'm not going to cry for the rest of my life." We still cry, even for no reason, but her statement became our declaration of independence in which we chose to ignore the hurting and get on with

the healing. I would like to tell you an angel visited us and answered all of our questions. This is not the case. "Why" questions still haunt us at times. We have decided dwelling on these questions is not productive. Our faith still is intact and we fully expect someday to understand. More appropriate questions are: "What am I going to do?" and "How am I going to do it?"

There are so many more things I would like to write. Some things are too sacred to share and some still bring hurt to the heart. Our closing witness to you is that because of Christ there is hope. Because of Christ, families can be forever. Because of Christ, you can survive the death of a son or daughter. Yes, "tomorrow is promised!"

DAD & DAUGHTER: ONE TO ONE

A noble experiment began November 1st when wife and mother, Alyce Whitmer, left home. This left 13-year-old Gayle and her dad to fend for themselves for two whole weeks. Yes, it would be a noble experiment to see if Alyce could make the trip to West Germany all by herself. It would be even more interesting to see if Gayle and Dad could survive without her.

Alyce passed her test with flying colors. She arrived at the Frankfurt Airport without any mishap, and daughter Melanie with husband, Jeff, were there with three 'grandkinder' to take her to their home for a two-week visit. I was pleased and proud that Alyce had the courage to make this long journey but I had failed to appreciate fully what her absence would mean to Gayle and Dad at home.

It is true Alyce made a heroic effort to prepare us. As a part of our last home evening lesson, she took us on a guided tour of the house. At each stop she reviewed what needed to be done and demonstrated just how it should be done. Gayle and Dad listened politely even though they were not entirely sure this was necessary.

We got by fairly well, empty house and all, until Saturday. I had an invitation to conduct a workshop for the Arcade

Ward leaders on "How to Survive a Church Calling." I made the silly mistake of asking Gayle if she would like to go along. In her candid and honest way, she said, "Not really."

I then went back to square one and said, "Gayle, I would like you to go. I need your help." She countered with, "Do I have to wear a dress?" Negotiations were settled agreeably when I offered to give her a driving lesson in the afternoon.

Meanwhile, back at home, Gayle wasted no time in assuming her new role. She took over the evening meals and by default I became the morning meal specialist. I soon became aware I was witnessing a miraculous metamorphosis. My 13 year-old daughter was emerging from her cocoon and becoming the butterfly in charge of the house.

A scripture from the Doctrine and Covenants comes to mind. "We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of [all 13 year-old daughters], when they get a little authority,... they begin to exercise unrighteous dominion [over their fathers.]" (D&C Section 121)

Perhaps I should illustrate what I mean. Sunday morning Gayle was ready to go to church 10 minutes early with no coaxing or urging from Dad. In fact, I felt a little nagged when she asked me if I was ready to go. Talk about role reversal! During the week, whenever Gayle found something of mine left out of place, she was less than subtle in reminding me it should be put away. In spite of her parental behavior, something extra special was yet to happen.

After meetings on Sunday, we were alone and Gayle suggested watching church videos to keep us from getting bored. We spent the next four hours experiencing true togetherness. The video was provocative and became the catalyst opening the door to spontaneous communication. We turned off the video and shared facts and feelings. She revealed how she felt about her friends and some of the things that go on at the junior high school. She asked questions about patriarchal blessings and how she can know when she has truly repented. Communication lines were wide open and we felt the intimacy that comes from

revealing to each other soul to soul. It reminded me of the closeness that comes on a backpack trip miles from all other people. It is the witness a parent needs to know it is all worthwhile.

As I write this account in my journal, we have survived the first week. We have eaten corn dogs, pizza and oatmeal mush. I even survived a bowling session in which Gayle topped my score. This cost me breakfast at Jack-in-the-Box and most of my adult ego. We have operated the washer and dryer without disaster, and we have arrived at a state of boredom trying to adjust to a house without Alyce. We have determined that life without Alyce is only uncomfortable but perhaps it is not dangerous or fatal at least for one week.

I am convinced our family experience is the great lab course of this life. There are great lessons to be learned from each experiment in our home lab. I have been reminded this past week that many mountain top experiences with our families come when we find ourselves one-to-one. What happened with Gayle and Dad this last week reminded me of times when we have gone on daddy-daughter dates in the past. Each time something important was communicated. Each time communication lines were opened without competing static.

The same thing happens when Alyce and I go for a long walk alone together. It is not always verbal communication and it is not always comfortable. It is always significant, and it is always worthwhile. Somehow the counsel from the brethren to have time alone with your spouse (and other family members) is in clear focus as I write this.

It occurs to me that this is giving the Gift of Self. As we approach the Christmas season, I am reminded that He whose birth we commemorate gave a gift of himself to the world. Perhaps as we scramble to find gifts for loved ones this year, we should all resolve to find ways to give the Gift of Self to our family members. In the hustle and bustle of busy lives, let's make time for One-on-One.

