



CECIL PAUL WHITMER

December 13, 1907 - January 7, 1983



Historical Profile

Cecil Paul Whitmer was born on 13 December 1907, in Alpine, Arizona. His mother Sarah Jane Judd Whitmer (known by all as Jennie) was 23 years old, and his father Angus Van Meter Whitmer was 28 years old at the time. Cecil was the third of 17 children. His older siblings, Angus and Ralph, were 1 and 3 years old when he was born. One brother Lealand Claude died of whooping cough on 8 August 1906.

Prior to his birth the family had just moved to Alpine, Arizona. According to David Keith Whitmer the Whitmer children were raised, "in the lusty 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.

A younger brother Harold would be born 2 years later in 1909. Then in 1910, when Cecil was 3, Chuck was born. His sister, Genevieve, was born in 1912 when Cecil was 4 years old, the same year as that of the sinking of the Titanic. Another sister, Ethel, was born in 1914 when Cecil was 7 years old, the same year as the beginning of World War I. Cecil's brother, Ray V, who had been born in 1915, died of pneumonia on 3 May 1917. Also in 1917 Cecil's brother, Afton, was born when Cecil was 10 years old.

When Cecil was about 5 years old, his Grandma Judd went to St. Johns so that her youngest 3 children Thora, Cubah and Ernest could attend school leaving Grandpa Judd alone. Jennie didn't like her father being alone so she let Cecil stay with him most of the time. During Christmas vacation Grandpa Judd went to St. Johns to be with his family and Cecil was allowed to go. But he did not return. He stayed with Grandma Judd and attended school until it was out in April. The next fall he attended school in Alpine where he stayed for the remainder of his elementary school years.

In 1918, when Cecil was 11, a terrible flu pandemic struck the United States and the entire world. The Spanish Flu of 1918 infected over a third of the world's population and killed more than 650,000 Americans alone, as the medical community desperately searched for better treatments or a vaccine. With World War I raging at the same time, it made for a very challenging year for just about everyone. Cecil's brother, Lawrence, was born this year.

Cecil was 12 years old when the first public radio broadcast aired in 1920. A year later his sister, Mary was born. Then in 1922 another brother, Vaughn, was born when Cecil was 14 years old.

At about 15 years of age he bruised his right leg playing basketball on an outdoor court, then bruised it again when his horse ran against a tree. He then became ill with influenza and it settled in his leg, and caused it to swell with infection. He spent many weeks in bed, first at Grandma Judd's, then under Dr. Wall's care in Springerville, then under Dr. Loveless's care in the hospital in Albuquerque, where the doctor said there was nothing that could be done except to amputate the leg. When Cecil was so much against that, he tried a new type of operation, and saved the leg.

One Sunday in his childhood Harold came running back to the house to get his mother saying, "Cecil had shot himself." When asked what he meant, he replied, "Well, he can't walk." Upon further investigation it turned out that Harold had actually shot Cecil. They were trying to catch the rabbits, and shot the rabbits. Then in order to gather the rabbits Cecil set the gun down and said to Harold, "Now don't touch that gun. It's loaded." Well, Harold had to see if it was loaded, and accidentally shot Cecil. It took three years of drives to Springerville, doctor's visits and surgeries before finally being able to get the bullet out.

Cecil's sisters, Faye and Fern, were born as twins in 1925.

When he was about 16, his Aunt Edna and her husband Rudolph Young invited him to come to their home in Port Angeles Washington, which he did. There he attended his first two years of high school. He also worked in a candy kitchen, and some at the big cooperage there, to make a little money on the side. After two years there he went home to Alpine, and during the two school years of 1926-28 he attended High School in St. Johns, Arizona. During his senior year he was the Student Body President.

Cecil's youngest sisters Blanche and Bertha were stillborn as twins in 1928 and were pronounced dead at birth.

Cecil'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 1930, just as the country was experiencing the collapse of the stock market and beginning a decade-long period of economic hardships in America known as the Great Depression, Cecil was offered a college scholarship; however, he didn't accept it as he could make more money from logging in Washington. As the Depression got worse, he and Harold, who was also in Washington working, could not find work, so they made their way back to Arizona.

At 23 years of age Cecil married 25 year old Stella Peterson on 24 December 1930 in Holbrook, Arizona, then went to the St. George, Utah Temple to be sealed on 6 January 1931. Stella continued teaching the rest of the school year up on the Arizona strip, and he worked on road jobs, or whatever he could, until her school was out in early May.

That summer they built a small log home about a block from his parents. With the depression so bad, he had to work just anywhere he could for several years. Later he bought a power saw, and cut timber for several years for Whiting Bros.

During those years seven children were born to Cecil and Stella. Charles Ray (11 August 1932), Edna (21 October 1934), Marcor Paul (7 May 1936), Arthur Claude (7 October 1938), John Rudolph, Margaret Rose, and Cecil Peter (24 October 1946). Times were hard, but they all learned to work and help out. By this time the family had moved back to the family homestead in Alpine, Arizona near Cecil's parents. Cecil was 30 years old at this point.

When Cecil was 31 years old, World War II began in Europe, just two decades after the end of the First World War. It would become the most destructive conflict in recorded history. One year after the atomic bomb dropped and the great war ended, Cecil and Stella welcomed their youngest child Cecil Jr. into the family on 24 October 1946. By this point the family had moved to Winslow, Arizona.

In November of 1951, Paul became ill (he and Claude both had bouts with Rheumatic fever) and the doctor in Springerville gave him a medicine which seemed to literally poison him. Paul died on 2 November 1951 at 15 and a half years. That was such a blow to Cecil, and then it snowed, and he had a log of timber down, which could not be hauled into the saw mill and be paid for. Everything seemed to be against him. He was out in the woods scaling the logs so that he could get some pay on them, when he slipped on the snow on a log and fell and bruised his bad leg. Suddenly the leg swelled up and Cecil was in very bad shape again. After many hospital visits and surgeries Cecil left the logging industry and worked whenever he could at carpenter work, or laying block, etc. This injury would bother him the rest of his life. Stella went back to school and got her degree, then began teaching in

Mesa. The children worked at whatever they could find, and continued to attend school.

The next decade brought the dawn of the Atomic age and the end of World War II (1945), the Korean War (1950), a Polio Vaccine in 1953, and the Vietnam conflict stretching from 1955-1975. During this time Cecil would see his father Angus Van Meter Whitmer pass away at the age of 76. Cecil would have been 47 at the time. Ralph's mother Jennie would live another 11 years until 1967 when she would also pass away at the age of 83.

Cecil experienced a great deal of pain as he aged, and was said to have had some rivalry going with the rough folks that lived in sometimes lawless Alpine, in the early days. Cecil's cabin was originally just a trail into Alpine called by some "sneak street" as lawless hunters would use it instead of the parallel Main Street as a way to get their poachings past the game warden. This lawlessness purportedly led to "grudges" that Cecil endured in Alpine from some of the other residents. Cecil is said to have participated in Church well into his older years and to have, "had a great participation in Sunday School theology discussions."

This was a time of great change in culture, in technology, and in global events. Martin Luther King Jr. would lead the nation in a civil rights movement. United States astronauts would land on the moon in 1969. Beginning in 1970 Ralph would begin to see his siblings also begin to pass, starting with his sister Genevieve in 1970 at the age of 61, and his brother Angus in 1977 at the age of 74. Five years later, in 1982, Ralph passed away at the age of 77 in Cortez, Colorado.

Cecil died on January 7, 1983 and was later buried in the Alpine Cemetery in Alpine, Arizona.

Cecil's Wife, Stella Peterson Whitmer

Personal Journal of David Keith Whitmer

My Aunt Stella

By David Keith Whitmer, 5/15/93

My family heritage includes a rich endowment of aunts and uncles, hence, I have dozens of cousins. My father, Angus Don Whitmer, was the oldest of seventeen children born to Angus VanMeter and Sarah Jane 'Jennie' Judd Whitmer. Twelve of Dad's sixteen brothers and



sisters lived to adulthood and hence they, along with their spouses became my aunts and uncles. One by one these special people are completing their earthly sojourn and joining those who have gone before.

In March of this year a telephone call from cousin Margaret informed us of the passing of her mother, Stella Peterson Whitmer, on March 24, 1993. This triggered a trip down memory lane so real and so vivid that I am going to try to capture some scenes from my mountains of memories. I will use word pictures to record my snap shots. Please join me at my place of birth, the high mountain hamlet of Alpine, Arizona.

Alpine is located in a verdant valley encircled by mighty mountains covered with virgin forests. This area is called the White Mountains. Alpine is at the eight thousand foot level in the north, south center of Arizona just eleven miles west of the New Mexico border. After a visit to Switzerland, I understood why this area is called the Alps of Arizona.

My memories of Alpine include Uncle Cecil and Aunt Stella. Their log cabin home was located between our place and the old Whitmer homestead built by my grandparents. It was a house on the hill which separated our log home from the home of our grandparents. Remembering this is triggering thoughts complete with pictures.

I see Uncle Cecil working on his Model-T pickup or sharpening a chainsaw. I see my dog, Lad, attack Uncle Cecil when he playfully comes after me as I walk past. I see cousins, Charles, Edna and Paul playing in the yard. I see their barn built from slabs from our sawmill. I even see their milk cows, Esther and Peggy, eating hay while being milked. I also see kids riding these same cows in a mock rodeo. I see Aunt Stella playing the piano at home and at church. I see their vegetable garden and the playhouse.

I am startled as I suddenly remember that our family lived in this house at one time. One unhappy picture comes into focus. It is a cold winter morning and as we look out

the window, we see our dog, Bobbie, near death trying to get up off the ice. Our pet had been poisoned by someone in town. This picture still haunts me.

In my mind I relive a hike with our twin aunts, Faye and Fern. We are in the upper pasture picking a wildflower bouquet of wild sweet peas, columbines, Indian paint brushes, etc. Along on the hike are Charles and Edna, my brother and sister, Neldon and Jerry. I hear Aunt Fern say, "Look at all the pretty ferns."

Without hesitation Charles, who is walking hand-in-hand with Faye, defensively responds, "No, they're not Fern's, Faye and Charles."

Uncle Cecil hired me to work for him in the timber cutting business when I was fourteen. I used my double bladed axe to cut limbs from pine trees, which had been fallen by Uncle Cecil and his big chain saw. My dad, Uncle Harold and cousin Milford, also worked on this crew of lumberjacks. Uncle Cecil knew how to motivate and bring out the best in me. He told others, "That Keith swings his axe like a man."

When our family moved to California, we never forgot Aunt Stella and Uncle Cecil. Years later, after I married and had a family of my own, we often stopped for visits in Mesa with this family. We always felt welcomed as a part of their family. We hurt for them with Uncle Cecil's painful and lingering illness. We admired Aunt Stella's return to school to update her teaching credential.

We have enjoyed John, Pete, and Edna and their families at Whitmer reunions. We have visited in John's home in Gilbert and Pete's home in Utah. We appreciate Edna and Margaret keeping us up to date. We thank Aunt Mary for sending a copy of the funeral program and thank Aunt Fern for sharing a tape recording of the service.

I am grateful for my Whitmer family heritage and I look forward to a joyous embrace from Aunt Stella at a Whitmer Family Reunion in the great beyond.

1986

A.V. WHITMER FAMILY REUNION

ALPINE, ARIZONA

June 27-29, 1986

Harold Whitmer, Patriarch

D. Keith Whitmer, President

John Whitmer, Reunion Chairman

"All Roads Lead to Alpine"

All Roads Lead to Alpine

By David Keith Whitmer, June 30, 1986

Someone has said, "You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy." In my life this translates to, "You can take me out of Alpine but you can't take away the feelings I get when I return to this special place of my birth and childhood."

In June of 1986 I returned to Alpine with my wife Alyce, my daughter Gayle and granddaughter Britta to attend the A.V. Whitmer Family Reunion. The Reunion theme was: "All Roads Lead to Alpine." The road we chose from Safford to Alpine was Route 666. It is known by the locals as the Coronado Trail. This is a scenic drive over a mountain road famous for turns, curves, and dips. Yes, this ride resembles an ocean voyage and it is not recommended for those subject to motion sickness.

This was a road I had traveled as a child and, as we drove, I tried, with limited success, to anticipate what was around each curve. When I recognized a landmark it would trigger a parade of pictured memories in my mind. Some of these pictures were clear and unmistakable, while others were fuzzy and difficult to identify. As we neared Alpine, I could feel the anxious anticipation build. It was like I was a participant on the Fantasy Island TV program and my fantasy was to return to Alpine to see if this place was real or just a figment of my childhood imagination.

I remember reading a book by Thomas Wolfe called *You Can't Go Home Again*. In my personal fantasy I would test and disprove Wolfe's thesis. Through the trees I got my first glimpse of the Alpine Valley. I recognized the 'white spot' on the side of Stanford Knoll above the old Whitmer Homestead. The entire valley was even greener and more picturesque than I remembered. Alpine is at 8000 feet elevation and it reminded me of the quaint hamlets we had seen traveling through the German and Swiss Alps. Yes, Alpine was a picture out of the past, a place that time forgot. As we drove into town floods of engulfing memories came and I wanted to stop and pinch myself to see if I was dreaming. Yes, Alpine is my place of birth, my Shangri-La. There is still something magnetic here that pulls at my inner being drawing me to this special place.

After we registered at the Mountain High Lodge, I left the family to unpack and I headed for a stroll down memory lane. Camera in hand, I headed for School House Hill to look over the valley and then to inspect the school house and the church building. The old red rock two room schoolhouse still looked the same as when I attended grades one through five; however, the two new wings looked strangely out of place. An inspection of the playground brought more pictures from the past. Some of the original equipment was missing, but I was sure the swings and the 'giant-strides' were the very ones I had played on nearly fifty years ago. The flag pole, donated by the Alpine Deacons, was still standing but it seemed to be in a different location and the inscription was fading.

The church house still looked majestic with its white limestone construction looking like it would forever withstand the elements. It was difficult to accept that the Alpine Ward has been disbanded and that this building is now used by the school. The Alpine Valley became a Mormon Colony in the late 1800s. My Uncle Harold now reports, "The gentiles took the Alpine Valley without firing a shot." Latter-day Saints who now live here must drive to Luna, New Mexico to attend Church. Looking at the church building brought pictures of the limestone being

transported from the quarry just above our log house to the building site on School House Hill. This building is a monument to the faith of the Alpine saints, and many Whitmer man-hours went into the construction. How proud we all were of this place where we were taught the eternal truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

When I returned to the Lodge, we went to visit the only Whitmer family still living in Alpine. Uncle Harold is now 77 years old and is the oldest living child of the seventeen children born to my paternal grandparents. He and Aunt Hessie have lived in their home in Alpine as long as I can remember. Their living room features Harold's trophy elk which is the largest elk I have ever seen. These antlers could serve as a hat rack for a whole regiment. This couple has become a local legend, carrying the mail on a rural route to the Blue River area for over fifty years. We enjoyed our visit with them and their son, Larry.

The next morning I got up early to continue my 'Fantasy Island' experience. I invited my wife, Alyce, to join me while the girls remained at the Lodge. At School House Hill we found the John Whitmer family. They had driven all night and John was asleep in the car while the kids explored. We walked to the old Whitmer Homestead and were given a VIP tour of the place by current owner, Bob Fite. The old home has been preserved, and they have made major additions to it. It is now a lovely large ranch house with about 3,400 square feet of floor space. During our tour, memories crowded upon memories, and I tried to share them with Alyce. We then hiked up through the lower and upper pasture areas. Many things have changed little in the forty years since our family moved away from this valley. I shared with Alyce the green meadows and the Aspen trees with initials carved so long ago. We ate watercress at the 'boiling over spring' near where George's Lake used to be. We then moved on to Parrel's Garden and beyond. Here we found more Aspen trees and stopped to carve our initials along with a heart. When we returned from

our hike, I was exhausted but I felt I had fulfilled and enhanced much of my fantasy by sharing it with my eternal companion.

In the afternoon we added icing on the 'fantasy cake' by taking the girls on a horseback ride out to Tom Judd's stables. Tom is a second cousin whom I remembered going to school with so many years ago. Our ride was a good experience except for droves of vicious deer flies set on making dinner out of man and beast alike. Later we visited the site of the two story log house built by my parents when I was a boy. Dad cut and cured the logs himself. He even cut the lumber and shingles with his own sawmill. This house has since burned and only the foundation, burnt out stoves, wild iris lilies, planted by Mom, now mark the spot.

The capstone of my fantasy was the Whitmer Family



Reunion. Approximately seventy-five family members strengthened family ties by visiting, eating and playing together. There were representatives from six of the original family members. Don, Cecil, Harold, Rex, Faye and Afton all had family members attending. Members and spouses from the original family who attended included: Stella, Harold, HESSIE, Rex, Claire, Faye, Afton and Lenora. The first cousins I counted were: Charles, John, Pete, Edna, Larry, Barbara, Adell, Judy and Donald. Cecil's son, John was the Reunion Chairman. The Reunion featured campfire visits, a potluck dinner at the church house, a family business meeting and program, dance & social and a Sunday morning devotional and testimony sharing time. A Reunion Booklet and a Family Directory were distributed to all attending. The booklet featured life stories of Afton, Lawrence and Mary.

I have learned that blood is thicker than water, and it is a right thing to get together in family reunions on a regular basis whether we feel like it or not. "We receive our witness after the trial of our faith." I am grateful for those who chose to come and it is my hope and prayer that other family members will feel the spirit of Elijah and choose to join us at the next reunion. There is freedom through forgiveness and it is my prayer that the miracle of forgiveness will open closed doors and allow all of the descendents of Angus and Jennie Whitmer to be united in an eternal family.

Perhaps Thomas Wolfe was right in concluding that places and people do change and are never the same. Even so, I am most thankful for my Fantasy Island experience at the 1986 Whitmer Family Reunion. Yes, for me, "All Roads Lead to Alpine."



Whitmer Family July 1944

Back L-R: Charles, Mom (Stella), Dad (Cecil), Edna
Front L-R: Paul, Margaret, John, Claude



Cecil & Stella Whitmer



**Cecil & Stella Whitmer
Children, abt 1940**

L-R: Paul, Edna, Claude, and Charles



**Cecil & Stella Whitmer
1966-67**



Cecil & Stella Whitmer

Family Fun, Mid 1940's

Front L-R: Paul, Charles, Claude

Top Back: John, Margaret, Edna

(Dad in cab)

Cecil & Stella Whitmer
Children, Early 1947

Clockwise from top:
Paul, Claude, Charles, John,
Margaret, Pete, and Edna



Fishing at Three Forks

Whitmer Mountains, Early 1940's

L-R: John, Claude, Edna, Charles, and Paul