



Mary and daughter, Jennie Mae

MARY WHITMER

January 20, 1921 - 2008



Historical Profile

Mary was born on 20 January 1921, in St. Johns, Arizona to her Father Angus Van Meter Whitmer (42 years old) and her mother Jennie (37 years old) as the twelfth of 17 children. Her older siblings, Angus, Ralph, Cecil, Harold, Chuck, Genevieve, Ethel, Ray, Afton and Lawrence were 17, 16, 13, 11, 10, 8, 6, 3 and 2 years old when she was born. Another brother Leland died at birth in 1906, long before she was born. Ray, who had been born in 1915, died of the whooping cough at 2 years of age, before Mary was born.

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.

One year after her birth, a little brother, Vaughn (Von), was born in 1922. Then in 1925 twin sisters Faye and Fern were born into the family. 3 years later in 1928 twin sisters Bertha and Blanche would be born but not survive the birth. These were the last of her siblings to be born to his parents. Mary was 7 at the time.

Mary was raised on a ranch where she and her family dry farmed. Mary’s family were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and according to her 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 parent’s bed.”

When Mary was 18 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. It was during this year that Mary met and fell in love with a young teacher who had recently moved to Alpine after finishing his master's program. 27 year old Alton Elwyn Montierth married 18 year old Mary on 21 December 1939. They began a family and settled in Safford Arizona where they remained for the rest of their lives. Either through birth or adoption 5 children joined the Montierth family under Mary's care. She is said to have always loved children and "always ran a daycare and was always taking care of kids." The names of their children are Jenny, Elwyn, Leland, Kimberly, and Wayne.

The next decade marked the dawn of the Atomic age at the end of World War II (1945), the Korean War (1950), a Polio Vaccine in 1953, and the Vietnam conflict stretching from 1955-1975. In 1955, when Mary was 34 years old, her father Angus Van Whitmer passed away at the age of 76. Mary's mother Jennie would live until 1967 when she would also pass away at the age of 83.

This was a time of great change in culture, in technology, and in global events. Martin Luther King would lead the nation in a civil rights movement. United States astronauts would land on the moon in 1969 when Mary was 48 years old. Beginning in 1970 Mary would begin to see her siblings also begin to pass, starting with her sister Genevieve in 1970 at the age of 61, and her brother Angus in 1977 at the age of 74.

Five years later in 1982 her older brother Ralph would pass away at the age of 77 followed the next year in 1983 by her brother Cecil at the age of 75. Then in 1985 Mary's sister Ethel passed away being 71 at the time. In 1987 her brother Chuck would die at the age of 76. Then in 1990 her brother Harold passed away

at the age of 81. Two years later in 1992 her brother Von passed away at the age of 69. Six years later in 1998 Mary's brother Afton died at the age of 81. Then in 2000 as the century turned Mary's brother Lawrence passed away.

One year later on 9/11 the nation watched in horror as one plane, and then another crashed into the iconic twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. These two planes were part of an elaborate terrorist attack which also brought down planes in Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania and took the lives of over 3000 civilians. These events initiated a new era of security protocols which changed many aspects of day to day life for travelling Americans.

A year later Mary's husband Alton became sick and moved to Idaho Falls to receive care from his son Leland and his wife. This went on for 2 years until Alton finally passed away in 2004 at the age of 91. They were married for 64 years.

When Mary was 83, a massive hurricane named Katrina hit parts of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama causing excessive damage and destruction. Thousands of people were left homeless and nearly 2000 died. Americans rallied during this time in support to help those impacted by the hurricane raising money and aid for those in need and taking displaced families into their homes.

In her final days in 2008 Mary watched her sisters Fern and Faye pass away as America began to sink into a recession caused by the collapse of an economic housing bubble. Shortly thereafter on Christmas eve of 2008 at the age of 87, Mary passed away joining her Alton in eternity. She was survived by her children Jenny, Elwyn, Leland, Kimberly, Wayne, 16 grandchildren, and 27 great-grandchildren.

Growing up with Alton and Mary Whitmer Montierth

by Kimberly Mary Montierth Brock

My mom and dad, Alton and Mary Whitmer Montierth, adopted me when I was a baby. I was sealed to them when I was three years old in the Mesa, Arizona, temple. At the time they adopted me, they had three other children born to them naturally: Jennie, who was around twenty, Elwyn, who was around 14, and Leland, who was around 10.

I never lived with Jennie, since she was away at ASU when my parents adopted me. I remember Elwyn around a little bit when I was a small girl, but mostly, I remember him coming home to visit from college. I mostly remember Lee at home. My parents also adopted a little boy, Wayne, when I was three.

My earliest memories of homelife with my mom and dad center around the kitchen and the “old place.” My mom was always cooking or baking or canning or making butter, and the kitchen was in use most of the day, it seems.

The “old place” was the home a cotton field away from our house on West Relation Street where my dad grew up. I guess the family lived in that home until my dad built the home I grew up in, sometime in the late 1950's. I came along in 1960, so I never lived at the old place, but I spent tons of time there. We had a small farm there – one cow in a corral, one sow (unless she had babies) in a pen, and some chickens in a chicken coop. Often, we leased the back corral to people for horse boarding. There was a hay barn and an equipment barn near the old home.

I LOVED running around at the old place, climbing trees, jumping off the hay barn, and generally escaping any housework my mom wanted me to do. We had free reign as kids – having clod fights in the cotton fields and playing at the old place, running around

like hooligans until my mom whistled for us from the front porch. She didn't do a regular whistle – she cupped her two hands together and blew into them. It was a more full, mellow sound than a whistle, but she could make it LOUD.

Besides cooking, my mom always had a quilt on. If it was being hand-quilted rather than tied, all my mom's friends and sisters-in-law would come by and help with the quilt. As kids, we would play with blocks and Hot Wheels cars under the quilt and listen to the ladies gossiping and laughing as they quilted. When I was a little older, I learned to hand-quilt and to tie quilts. I made quilts with my mom for decades, and still make tied quilts. I would hand-quilt if I knew someone who could mark the quilts for me. I've never had any experience with machine-quilting. Putting on a quilt was one of my favorite things to do with my mom.

Another thing my mom taught me was to crochet. Even as a young teenager, I made “afghans,” as we called crocheted blankets back then. I have crocheted through many children's sports games (especially baseball and softball, since they don't have quite as much action as the other sports), and through many TV shows. I can't even sit and watch TV without doing something else, and often that is crocheting. My mom always said I held my crochet hook like a pitchfork. Apparently, I never picked up the proper technique she tried to teach me. She always marveled at how fast I was, considering I didn't even hold my hook properly.

My mom always recruited me to work with her in the kitchen, whether baking or canning or making butter or dinner. I learned much from her in these areas, even though this was NOT my favorite chore. My mom was very messy in the kitchen and when we were done with whatever we were making, there was a huge mess to clean up. As a result, I always tried to trade my kitchen duty days with my little brother

for his laundry days. As an adult, I clean up as I go in the kitchen, so when I'm finished, there is little to no mess. But the memories of being in the kitchen with mom are dear to me now.

We always went on Sunday drives. Before Grandmother Whitmer passed away, we'd pick her up at her little house on north 8th Avenue in Safford, go to the Dairy Queen, and drive on all the back roads in the Gila Valley. We'd sing, or my mom and grandma would talk. After Grandmother passed away, we would go to the Pima Cemetery a few times each year to clean up the gravesite of her and grandpa Whitmer, and a couple of their kids who passed away as babies.

We also visited mom's family members who lived nearby often. They came to our home also. I remember our trips to visit family, as well as their visits to our place. Uncle Afton and Aunt Lenora came the most, as they got together to play cards with my parents regularly.

As I grew up and got married and had kids of my own, my parents became Nana and Granddad. When I was in college at Arizona State, they had started the tradition of bringing me all the paper goods I might need, as well as shampoo and conditioner. This continued throughout the beginnings of my married life, even though we could purchase our own. Nana and Granddad never came without a load of toilet paper, paper plates and paper towels, along with shampoo, when they came to visit.

My kids loved Nana's sugar cookies and chocolate chips, and her cinnamon rolls and green chile burros. When we visited them in Safford, the refrigerator and freezer were always stocked with yogurt, ice cream

bars and popsicles for the kids, as well as cookies and candy on the counter. Mom and Dad were always puttering around our house when they visited – fixing loose stair rails, folding clothes, doing dishes or other never-ending tasks that went with raising my six kids.

As well as the sweets, my kids also love Nana's green beans, dressing (stuffing), beef enchiladas and macaroni salad. I had to learn to make these exactly like my mom – since to this day, my kids request "Nana's" version of these foods, and we often hear "these are good, but I like Nana's better."

As my kids got older, and my boys started to show their independence by growing out their hair, Nana would tease them by tugging on their long locks and by threatening to cut their hair off while they were asleep. She was a big tease to all my kids, often telling them she was going to throw them to the moon and popping her dentures out at them when they weren't expecting it. My kids love Nana and Granddad with all their hearts.

Growing up with Alton and Mary Whitmer Montierth gave me a great childhood and a foundation of hard work, self-reliance and unselfishness. I have many more memories of life with them, but these are some of the most prominent. I am forever grateful that they decided to adopt a little girl from California, even though they were an older couple. Their unconditional love helped me become the person I am today, and their influence of love and unselfishness carries on in my children. I think Nana and Granddad would be proud of the person I am and the family I raised.

