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Marvin Whitson, 2014

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Shane Watson: Good afternoon. Today is June 19th, and on behalf of Crossroads to Freedom, Rhodes College, and Team for Success we'd like to thank you for coming out to tell us about your story. My name is Shane Watson. Your interview will be archived at the Crossroads of Freedom website, and we'd like to thank you for coming out today to tell us your story. To get started, could you tell us a little bit of background information?

Marvin Whitson: Tell you about what?

Shane Watson: Background information about yourself starting with your name and where you are from.

Marvin Whitson: My name is Marvin Dale Whitson.

Shane Watson: Where are you from?

Marvin Whitson: Right here in Lake County, but I was born in Kentucky in a place called Betsy Bend. A lot of people know it as Horseshoe Bend because it's shaped like this. Tennessee runs into it, and you can't go no further because you'll run into a river anyway you go, and that's where I was born in 1946.

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Shane Watson: That's very interesting. So it's shaped like horseshoe, because of the river, did you guys play in the river or the water at all when you were younger?

Marvin Whitson: No we never played in the river, because none of us could swim. My daddy could be we couldn't.

Shane Watson: So what was it like growing up in Horseshoe Bend?

Marvin Whitson: Well farm work, chopped cotton, chopped baynes, chopped corn, and then from the crops was all left. You had to do something if you wanted to eat. I helped my daddy split of fence post, quarter them move, and load them up in our own truck, and he'd go sell

them. I helped him pick up pecans, and sell them to a grocery store or something. Then the grocery store would get rid of them, and they would buy them, and then I helped him pick up corn. The combines back then, they didn't get all the corn. They left about as much as they got, and it was just a little bit of way to make a little bit of money to get something to eat.

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Marvin Whitson: Other than that they wouldn't have anything.

Shane Watson: That's really interesting. Sounds like you guys did a lot of handiwork. So what made you want to move to Lake County, Tennessee?

Marvin Whitson: Well we had lived on a farm. I had worked on a farm, we lived on a farm up until 1963, and then in '64 we moved to the lake. Of course my daddy had done everything to make a nickel, because you know for everybody to live there would've been 10 of us, and he had to do something if you want a few beans and potatoes. We come and when we moved to the lake in '64 he went to work on the river where things got a little better. Of course, I got a job then. I've done a little bit of everything.

Shane Watson: That's really interesting. You've said you've done a little bit of everything. Can you tell us a little bit of what you've done, and with your work opportunities?

Marvin Whitson: Started out as farm laborer working from—

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Marvin Whitson: -- 6:00 o'clock in the morning till 6:00 that evening for \$3.00 dollars a hand for chopping cotton. I worked construction. I've worked in two factories. I've worked at a saw mill, worked in another factory, and then went to the state on the last farm in 1989, and I retired in 2013.

Shane Watson: So you're a recent retiree. So what do you do with all your time now that you're free?

Marvin Whitson: Not much of anything. They ain't much to do here. I mean I like to go to the river. I like to watch the boats go by, and mainly do a whole lot of nothing.

Shane Watson: I would say you've probably gained the right to not have to do anything since you've worked for so long. If you had one job that you would say was your favorite, or –

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Shane Watson: -- the best thing you've ever done at one of your jobs, what would be the job that you'd say was your favorite out of all the jobs that you worked?

Marvin Whitson: Well when I come to work for the state, because I had done a lot of work on the farm, and farm work is hard. Of course then it wasn't as mechanized as it is now. I mean now everything is just buttons, but then it wasn't. I mean you quit plowing the beans and get that ho, and get them all chopped. Chemicals, there wasn't hardly any chemicals. There was just one or two, and you'd kill all the grass with that hoe. That was some hard work from 6:00 to 6:00.

Shane Watson: That's unheard of nowadays to work from 6:00 to 6:00. So you say working for the state was your favorite job. What exactly did you do for the state?

Marvin Whitson: I was a conservation worker one. I drove the garbage truck. I cleaned the bathrooms, and I picked up what people would throw stuff out on the side of the road. I've done that. I've painted.

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Marvin Whitson: I've dug holes, or whatever they wanted me to do, which you never knew. It was something different every day.

Shane Watson: So it kept you on your toes.

Marvin Whitson:

Shane Watson: So this was a job where you had weekends off?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah. See I had to be on probation while I was working for a good while, and then mine just more or less to see how I was going to work out, to see if I was going to work or stay there, and after that well I got to get off on the weekends.

Shane Watson: Nice, nice. We're going to switch it up a little bit, and talk about your educational experiences.

Marvin Whitson: Well I went to the first grade, second grade, and the third grade. When I got out of the fourth grade, and into the fifth I was about 14 years old, and I told my daddy, I walked up to him, and I said, "daddy I want to quit school."

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Marvin Whitson: My daddy was a little bitty guy, and he looked at me and he said, "boy I'm going to put you to work." That's just what he did when I was 14 years old. Put me to work in the new ground. Ground that had been cleared by a Caterpillar, and I did that, and then I got a little bigger, and I went to chopping the cotton, sort the beans, and corn, but he put me to work in the fields at 14 years old.

Shane Watson: Would you say that was common for children in your day and age to just go to work?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah. A lot of people had big families, and they had to have maybe all of them, or some of them, because you pick \$3.00 worth of half a day, somebody had to work. Of course things then weren't nearly as high as they are now. Medicine wasn't all that high, and mainly people lived on the farm, and you lived off of salt pork, white beans, and harsh potatoes, and tea. That's what you lived off of. I mean the Dairy Queen out here, never even knew it was there –

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Marvin Whitson: -- until we moved to the lake in '63.

Shane Watson: So speaking of the lake, I'm pretty sure you probably spent a lot of time there when you were younger and you had a little off time, and you said that's your favorite spot now. Do you have interesting stories when you were younger, or nowadays when you go to the lake?

Marvin Whitson: Well yeah when I was working out there, people would come from everywhere. I mean everywhere you could think of, and of course I had that uniform on since I worked for the state of Tennessee, and they'd say where the fish at is? I don't know I don't fish. Well where do they bite? Well I don't know I didn't even fish. If I had known I would've told them. People would ask well how to I get to Memphis, or how do I go get to so and so? Now me, I'd always tell them if you ain't lost you will be when you talk to me, because I don't know nothing about the highways.

Shane Watson: So you never had a chance to drive, or had a license, or anything?

Marvin Whitson: Oh I can drive, but I liked to –

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Marvin Whitson: -- drive down to Dyersburg, or Union City, or Nashville I'd never get there, because I don't know nothing about you know stop, or turn right, turn left, go on, I'd never get there.

Shane Watson: That's interesting. So you've been here a while, and I'm pretty sure you would say a lot of things have changed since you've been here. What would you say the biggest change has been since you've been in Lake County?

Marvin Whitson: Well, mainly the farming and the prison up here. We've got two big prisons up here, and that's two things, but farming now. It's more or less just buttons and everything is computer. You know with buttons, and you don't do any hard work. The prisons up here, we've got two big prisons and a lot of people if they don't work on the farm then they go up there to the prison up there as guards.

Shane Watson: I've noticed since I've been here, I've only been here for a week, but I've noticed that they're putting in a stop light. Is that something –

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Shane Watson: -- that's new to you?

Marvin Whitson: Yea, well they're building a river port up yonder at Cates Landing, and they've got that road paved all the way up there, and for years as long as I can remember the light would just stop and go. We would just pull up there, and go on, but since they've done this right here they're figuring on a lot of traffic going through up there going to the port, and I'd figure traffic is going to get so thick they're going to have to have a stop and go light. So a working red light, and that's the first red light, well working one you know that's ever been here.

Shane Watson: We're going to back track a little bit to your childhood. Would you say you had any role models when you were younger?

Marvin Whitson: Well probably my oldest brother, and then later on my uncle.

Shane Watson: What do you think the reason was that they were your role models when you were younger?

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Marvin Whitson: Well of course my older brother he had to work too and he worked hard. He worked at the hay mill, and of course by quitting school there's a lot of things I don't know, and there's a lot of things that I do, and of course he almost finished high school, and he helped me a whole lot. Then of course my uncle, he just had good common sense, and he learned me a lot of stuff.

Shane Watson: I noticed you have a Ruger hat on, and my great grandfather used to where the same hat all the time. I wonder if there's anything interesting, like a story behind you wearing that hat.

Marvin Whitson: Well I'm a target shooter. I love to shoot targets, and that's one of my favorite pieces is a Ruger gun.

Shane Watson: So did you ever hunt when you were younger? Do you hunt now?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah, yeah. I hunted those rabbits, and then of course my brother, he was a duck hunter. He'd go and shoot the ducks, and I'd go and kill the rabbits.

Shane Watson: I'm guessing from what my grandfather used to tell me, they used to hunt rabbits, and squirrels, and they used to cook them and eat them. did you guys cook the rabbits ---

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Shane Watson: -- and the ducks?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah, you cook that rabbit like you do chicken, and make you some gravy with it. Of course if you don't shoot him up too bad, you won't break your teeth after close to them shots. Now listen that rabbit is good now. It's about a good of thing you can eat.

Shane Watson: I've had rabbit in my day, and I have to say it's not as bad as I thought it would be. It actually tastes like regular meat.

Marvin Whitson: My only problem when I shot 'em, I always killed 'em, and pulverized 'em, and tenderized 'em, with one shot everywhere then you shot all the pieces, too quick on the trigger.

Shane Watson: Speaking of your uncle and brother, do you have any family around that you still talk to?

Marvin Whitson: I've got a sister over here at the Natural Gas. That's my oldest sister, and then I got my baby sister lives up there in Philippe up there off of highway 78 north. She's about, I don't know, probably 14 miles up the road. Then I got one brother --

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Marvin Whitson: -- left, and he's on highway 78 north. Once you get up there, there's a shop. Seems like it's right here, and you take a drive going in over yonder, because if his truck is outside he's got a black Ford Ranger, and he's got a grey Plymouth Van.

Shane Watson: So I'm guessing you guys still stay in contact a lot, and still communicate a lot?

Marvin Whitson: What?

Shane Watson: Do you guys still stay in contact and communicate?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah.

Shane Watson: I want to go back to your childhood again. Did you family attend church when you guys were younger?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah, my momma did, but my daddy just wouldn't go. He did for a while, and then he just absolutely wouldn't go.

Shane Watson: So were you forced to go to church from your mom, or were you more like your dad and didn't go to church?

Marvin Whitson: Well I didn't like to go to church when I first started. My mom would just almost have to drag me, but I'm going to tell you when I seen that I needed to be saved, and what to do –

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Marvin Whitson: -- a team of Clydesdale couldn't held me, because I knew I had one chance, and if I didn't take that chance, I was going to wind up down there with the devil, and I sure didn't want to wind up down there.

Shane Watson: So you'd say church means a lot to you.

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah, I was raised in the church when I was a kid. I even cleaned up when I got grown.

Shane Watson: So as an organization, Crossroads of Freedom likes to talk about assets based community development, which basically means we focus on the things that brings value to communities. If there is anything in Lake County that you think is the most valuable thing to you, what would it be?

Marvin Whitson: You mean money wise, or job wise?

Shane Watson: Anything you think that is of value to you; money, family, friends, a building, anything.

Marvin Whitson: Well I love history. They got a little bit of history there –

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Marvin Whitson: -- in that there museum, and then the state has a museum right there. Now I love history, and that's valuable to me, because I like to know what's happening. That's just like there in the civil war this town was burned, and I had a relative in that battle, and I had another relative. He was a northern army. I've seen a picture of him. He was an officer. He had a blue uniform with a gold bar, and a gold braid on his hat, but the other one he was involved here in the burning of the town when the civil war was going on.

Shane Watson: That's really cool. Did any of your family members tell you about the history of the civil war around here?

Marvin Whitson: Well I had a pretty close kin, he was a cousin, but he was pretty close kin, and he got a hold of some books about our private, actually he wrote it down day by day what the life was like in the civil war. It was a rough life; because he had to drill, march –

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Marvin Whitson: -- dug deep a hard tag, cold in the winter and of course I talked to everybody about the civil war, because I'm highly interested in that.

Shane Watson: We'd love to hear more about your stories of the civil war if you'd like to tell us.

Marvin Whitson: Well they were a pretty good battle fought in here. It was a pretty good battle, and then up there from where I was born, right up there, well you got Missouri on this side. You jump across the river you got Kentucky here. If you go across, you've got Kentucky over here, and you got Missouri over there, now there was a pretty good battle up there.

Shane Watson: Can you tell us a little bit more about that battle specifically?

Marvin Whitson: Yeah that battle at Island number 10, they were probably involved in this, and then there was a place, Winchester, Tennessee, for I don't know whether the guy was an admiral or not, but his name was Andrew Foote. He was in charge of a bunch of big gun boats.

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Marvin Whitson: Southern soldiers are a part of the rebels. Them guys were starving to death. They couldn't get nothing to eat. They were dying from dysentery and malaria, and of course when Foote, wherever he comes from, he comes down with his big flotilla, them guys gave up. I mean there wasn't any use of trying to fight those big cannons, because the rebels up there had small arms, and a few batteries. So it was useless. They just gave up, and they made it to Union City, and a northern army caught them again. They had a pretty good battle up there.

Shane Watson: So speaking of history of this area, since we're just visiting and we don't know much about history, is there any story that particularly stands out to you as your favorite historical story of this area?

Marvin Whitson: Well there are several. Like I was telling you about –

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Marvin Whitson: -- when I talked to that black man, now that was in the '70s. That was back there about 1970, and if a person would sit down and talked to him, they'd probably tell them more, because he knows

because he was probably at least 80 years old then. That was back in the '70s, and of course right here at the end of town that's where he load that cotton by hand on that steam boat, and took it off that steam boat by hand. That wasn't any gasoline motor, there weren't any diesel motors, just steam.

Shane Watson: This is kind of amazing, because there's actually no river over there anymore, which is kind of astonishing.

Marvin Whitson: Well right here, this town right here, you just drop not too far. It just drops over like that, that is the old river bed. That's where the river used to be. Now of course it's all over there about maybe a mile further or half a mile.

Shane Watson: We'll definitely have to check that out.

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Shane Watson: We've talked a lot about the history that you like about the city, your experiences here, your work experiences and all of that, we've asked everybody this question, and it's been hard for some people, and easy for others. One of the questions we've asked is if you could describe the Lake County in one word, what would it be and why?

Marvin Whitson: It's a good place to live. It's a good place to live, because right here everybody knows everybody, and people that's moved here that's never lived here once they're here a while they like it. It's just a small community, but it's just a good place to live.

Shane Watson: Would you say that's what happened to you? Once you came here you didn't want to leave?

Marvin Whitson: Yeah, we were 50 miles up there in Kentucky where I was born at. It was 25 miles coming to town, and 25 miles going back home. So coming to town was a rarity. It was generally –

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Marvin Whitson: -- just get to come every once in a while.

Shane Watson: So, you came every once in a while, was this like a big city when you were younger?

Marvin Whitson: Yeah there were a whole lot more people, and there was a whole lot more businesses, because everybody worked on a farm, and of course I've never seen it, but I heard about it, but on Saturdays the streets would be so crowded people would have to kind of turn sideways to get passed them. They were buying up there groceries, but there were a whole lot of buildings here that ain't here now.

Shane Watson: So when your family came to town, what did you guys normally do?

Marvin Whitson: Well, us the kids, they had a park right up here, and they had a seesaw, and it had swings, and of course that's where we headed for. We had a swing, but it was a car tire on a chain, and that's where we'd head for. Of course if we had any money, which was not very much, there were Five in Dime right across the road there, and that was like Christmas come early when you went in there, because it was everything a kid could want –

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Marvin Whitson: -- and that was fun to go in there.

Shane Watson: We spoke about your brothers and sisters I don't think I asked this question, how many brothers and sisters did you actually have?

Marvin Whitson: There would've been 10 siblings if all of them would've lived. They're all gone but four. Four are alive, and six dead.

Shane Watson: Okay, sorry to hear that. So we've talked a lot about everything; your life, the community, how it was like when you were younger, how it is now, and before we conclude this interview I'd like to ask is there anything else you would like to add before we close this interview?

Marvin Whitson: Well when I was coming up there until 1963, the best time of year was Fourth of July, because I knew I was going to get out of the field, and have plenty to eat, and not have to work. Christmas getting come to town. That was the best time of year.

Shane Watson: I actually have another question for you. When you were younger, besides coming to the city, and when you might have gotten some time off from the field, what did you do for fun, you and your brothers and sisters?

Marvin Whitson: Well more or less then, you know kids now they just get all kinds of toys. Then when I was coming up, you more or less had to invent what you wanted to play with. I made a million sling shots, a bow an arrow. Cut me down a sap with about that big around, and make my own arrows, and own bow, because I mean you know well even if I had wanted a bow there wouldn't have been enough money to buy it coming off the farm. So I just made my own.

Shane Watson: So did you shoot animals? Did you terrorize your brothers and sisters with it?

Marvin Whitson: No I never did shoot anything like that. no, but sling shots I cutt many of pork and stop like that, and if you took a knife and notched it, and then you took that inner tube, and stretched it over it like that, and tied it down real good and tight you'd have a pretty good sling shot. Just about time a lot of times you'd put it right like that and it would break –

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Marvin Whitson: -- I have made it with one rubber. I would cut out of an inner tube of a car, and just stretch it over your thumb, and every once in a while, in place of a rock going over your thumb. It'd hit your thumb and it'd feel like it was broke for a few minutes.

Shane Watson: So you said you didn't shoot at your sister, or your brothers, or any animals. What exactly did you aim to shoot at with your –

Marvin Whitson: Mainly just targets in the woods, you know like a rotten log, or something, or pick out something I could hit. You know it was a lot of fun just to pull it back, and watch the arrow shoot out of site, and just hope it stuck up in the ground where you can find it. Of course fishing canes were my arrows, but they made pretty good arrows, and plenty of them so there wasn't any shortage of arrows.

Shane Watson: Was there anything else you guys did for fun?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah, we got a little bigger, we had corn cob wars, and that's where people would feed cows and horses you'd throw the corn cob down –

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Marvin Whitson: -- and of course the horses and cows they had a water trough. We'd soak them corn cobs, and then lay in them and let them get water soaked, and throw them. You could get the living daylight's knocked out of you with a corn cob somebody could throw. Now I mean wherever you got hit, if the cob was that long you'd have red welt from here to here. Dirt clods, where like I said, machinery then they didn't have it like they got now, we'd have a dirt clod war. You know you'd be seven or eight out there in the field, and everybody chuck, and you know will never go with those jumbo dirt clods. Someone could throw it and you'd get hit, and you'd want to limp.

Shane Watson: So having fun with all this knowing that you'd come home with possibly a scar on your face, what did your parents think about this?

Marvin Whitson: They knew we were doing it. They'd always tell us well you'll get over it before you're married think twice, and we'd go back and do it again.

Shane Watson: Alright, well I don't have any other –

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Shane Watson: -- questions, and unless you have anything else to add we're just going to conclude the interview, but it was really nice talking to you, and we really appreciate you coming out to talk to us.

Marvin Whitson: I took lids out of a coffee can, I don't know what they come off of, but it used to you could find little bitty pieces of steel about that big around, and about that wide, and just have something play with, because like I said we just got stuff for Christmas. That was only. Nail that coffee can lid down to a stick about that wide, and cup it up like that, and roll that sort of band of iron. I think it come off a wagon. If you didn't like to read you had to invent what you wanted to play with.

Shane Watson: So I'm guessing you didn't like to read when you were younger?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah I love to read.

Shane Watson: Are there any stories you remember reading as a child?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah, Tom Sawyer, yeah I loved Tom Sawyer once I read it.

Shane Watson: What made you like --

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Shane Watson: -- that story so much?

Marvin Whitson: Well mainly because we were close to the river like he was, and just the things that he does, because my daddy commercial fished, and of course you see the river traffic then but it's nothing like it is now. I mean then you'd see a barge coming, and it probably has 30 new cars on it. Of course it was made where they were on top, and they were lined up above, and when they got up there at Hickman, they'd drive them off and people bought them. You don't see that anymore.

Shane Watson: You said your dad liked to fish. Was that like a delicacy for you guys to eat at dinner sometimes?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah, yeah. Not all my brothers, but the three younger ones yeah. We'd have catfish. We'd have crappie. We'd have brim, and we'd eat, and of course that's what he did. He commercial fished after he came off the river, and sold of them catfish, I think they brought --

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Marvin Whitson: -- pretty good money. We had some good fish fries.

Shane Watson: I bet, I love a good fish fry myself. Speaking of your father, and your parents, I want to know more about your mother. What did she do? How was she like as a mother?

Marvin Whitson: Well my momma didn't have any education either, not much. She was raised over at Dyersburg, around Bogota. She was raised there, and my daddy was born up there where I was. I think my daddy was born in 1916, and my momma was born in 1917.

Shane Watson: Although they were from different areas, I'm pretty sure they came together, and had some values that they wanted to instill in you and your brothers and sisters. Are there any values that they tried to instill in you that you remember to this day?

Marvin Whitson: Yeah, now my momma, she did not like Lake County at all. She was used to those hill over there around Dyersburg, and of course my daddy was raised up there, and he liked up there and she didn't. She wanted to go back to Dyersburg.

Shane Watson: So I'm guessing --

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Shane Watson: -- they kind of compromised and came in the middle of Lake County?

Marvin Whitson: Yeah. Of course we all had to work, and if you done something you need to get whooping for you got a whooping maybe from both of them.

Shane Watson: Those had to be pretty painful to get whippings from both of your parents.

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah, I mean my daddy maybe do a little something and he might not come up till later in the evening, but when he comes in he hadn't forgot. He reached out and got that belt, and he'd say come here boy, and it was on. You know what I mean? He'd whooped until he was satisfied you got a good whooping.

Shane Watson: I couldn't imagine. I really couldn't. I don't think I have any more questions. Is there anything else you'd like to add as well?

Marvin Whitson: Well like I said, we all had to work in the field, all of us, all of us that were home. My two older brothers got in the navy back in the '50s. So that left me and my –

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Marvin Whitson: --older brother. He was big enough to work, and my momma and daddy would work in the field.

Shane Watson: What was it like for your brothers to go off in the military? Did they come back here? Did they move away?

Marvin Whitson: Yeah they come back here. My oldest brother did 20 years. He came back as a chief petty officer, and my other brother was on a destroyer. He stayed for four years and came back. They worked on the farm, and they just wasn't any money. They weren't able to make any money so they got in the service they got to make a little bit more money. It was a better life too. There was more to eat, you know and they've seen the world, a lot of it.

Shane Watson: So did they happen to fight in any of the wars at all?

Marvin Whitson: My oldest brother, he went to Vietnam about three times, but he was on a mine stripper. You know where they would old wire searching in Sand pans for little old boat for contraband, rivals, and stuff like that, for ammuniton, and then of course –

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Marvin Whitson: -- them Vietnamese, they put mines out, great big old mines, and if one of those ships bump one it would blow them to smithereens. There wasn't anything left of it, and it was there job to get that mine, and disarm it to where the thing wouldn't blow up. If that little old mine scraper is about like I told you. If it had bumped one of those mines there wouldn't have been anything but itty bity pieces falling out there in the water.

Shane Watson: That must've been a very hard job. So when he came back, did he have any amazing stories that he told you about being in Vietnam?

Marvin Whitson: Well he was in the navy. He didn't have to get off on the land. He was on that little old ship, but he was stationed in California, Maryland, Detroit, San Diego, California, and Dyersburg, Hawaii. He's seen quite a bit of the world.

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Shane Watson: And your other brother, did he see any places of the world?

Marvin Whitson: Yeah he's seen a few of those countries, but not as many as my older brother, and of course my other brother that was on the destroyer, he's just a few years older than me. Both of them are dead, but I know when he got out me and him were picking cotton in the field, and there was this Marine of course he was a recruiter. It was his job to get you to join back up, and he and brother were just like two bull dogs. Of course that marine was trying to get him to rejoin, and my brother he was real hot headed, and they'd get into it. I'd say well they gonna fight today, but a day or two later here comes that marine back, and he's back out there again, but he never did go back in, but my older brother did.

Shane Watson: What did he do when he went back in?

Marvin Whitson: He was in the engine room for a long time, but when he come up in rank, he's pretty high rank as chief petty officer. He had some guys under him then, and he didn't have to have to work on them motors or anything. He was on a aircraft carrier.

Shane Watson: I'm guessing that when they went out and came back they had families, and so on, and so forth?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah.

Shane Watson: Do you have any nieces, nephews, great nieces, and nephews that you really liked that, or that you came really accustomed to hanging out with, or taking care of?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah I've got a nephew right down here. I think a lot of them my nieces and nephews. I got several nieces and nephews.

Shane Watson: Do you know what they do now with their lives?

Marvin Whitson: Well this one nephew right down here, he's a body man, fixes cars. Then I got another nephew, he's at Colonial Rubber at Dyersburg, and then I got another nephew over there and he's at PolyTech One I think that's where he's at, he's in there. Then of course my brother I –

[0:32:00]

Marvin Whitson: -- got left, he put over 30 years in with TWRA (Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency) and retired, got some of them in the military.

Shane Watson: That's a pretty amazing family story. So I still don't have any questions, but if you have more stories to tell we're definitely here to listen to you if you have anything to add.

Marvin Whitson: Well like I said, when I was coming up in the '50s TV was black and white. You couldn't get but two stations, and when the wind blows you'd get one station, because its blow the arrow and you couldn't pick it up. Like I said, somewhere along there in the '50s they give away government commodities, government food, and I can remember three or four winters, or more if hadn't been for that right there –

[0:33:00]

Marvin Whitson: -- dinner and supper would've been real slim, because it just wasn't anything. My daddy come to town and get into it. Of course that's what it was for, for poor people who just didn't make enough, but it was good food. It was good food.

Shane Watson: You spoke on TVs being black and white, and nowadays everything is colored, and it's thinner, and it's bigger. How does that change your perspective on watching TV?

Marvin Whitson: Oh man, when we first got the colored television I really liked that being used to a little screen and it was black and white. Then that color just brought it to life, you know the colors. The old houses we lived in, this is the truth of the old houses we lived in the wall paper would be that thick. The wind would blow, and that wall paper would come out like that, and sat back, and coffee cans lids left holes in the walls, knot holes, but you –

[0:34:00]

Marvin Whitson: -- could wall the air outside, and try to keep the wind out.

Shane Watson: So did you and your father, you and your brothers and sisters have to go ahead and fix up the house whenever there was some damage occurred?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah, like I said, my daddy was an itty bitty guy, but every house we ever lived in he'd get a roll of, you could buy paper then, he'd get that and a pound of tack, and he'd paper houses all night long until he got every room papered. It wasn't straight, but it was papered.

Shane Watson: You mentioned that your father was a little guy a couple of times. Were you, and your brothers, and sisters all taller than your father?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah. Now my baby sister wasn't. She's like my daddy. She's short, but all the rest of the boys they were quite a bit taller. My daddy was only about 5'1"/5'2", about 115 pounds. He was a little guy.

Shane Watson: So how did you end up so tall? That's amazing.

Marvin Whitson: Well I had a bunch of uncles way back years ago, and they were most of them were around six foot.

[0:35:00]

Marvin Whitson: My daddy he was as stout as a great big man. I mean before he got down he was really stout, because he worked all the time. I mean he could pick up a 100 pound fish, and sling it, and put it on his back, and walk up the river bank with it, and keep going. That's a load for a little guy.

Shane Watson: So you spoke about fixing the house whenever there was damage. Where there any big storms that came through when you were younger?

Marvin Whitson: A few, a few. We lived in old houses. It wasn't ceiling You could look up there, and you can see the rafters in the ceiling. It was just tin roof, and if it started raining it sound like it was coming through the tin. Wasn't anything but rafters, wall like that, it was just two by fours in the wall. Then around the ceiling up here it was like a tube eight, that's where the aspen, turpentine, --

[0:36:00]

Marvin Whitson: -- and all of set. To fix that of course you know then your parents doctored only. I mean if something really bad happened, they doctored themselves, of course it didn't always work, but sometimes it did.

Shane Watson: You had 10 brothers and sisters. That must have been hard to live in a house with 10 brothers and sisters.

Marvin Whitson: Well three of them I never did know them. Two of them were born dead. The other one, he'd be older than me. He died when he was a baby of whooping cough, and then my two older brothers I've been around them quite a bit now until they died. I would have liked to have known my other two brothers and sister. One of them, his name would've had to been changed, because his name

was Marvin too. So would've had to have been a name change there somewhere.

[0:37:00]

Shane Watson: So you're kind of like the second Marvin.

Marvin Whitson: Of course whooping cough then, there wasn't anything you could do for it. I mean it was just a little bit, and it killed a lot of people.

Shane Watson: That had to be a devastating situation for your family and for the community for a lot of children to not make it through.

Marvin Whitson: Of course, my momma was coming up when she was throwing up from the girl, doctors had a horse and a buggy, and instead of money, people would pay him with eggs, and chickens, or whatever they had like that, and he'd take that like money.

Shane Watson: So with hospitals now having their own cars, and taking money, did that change anything for your family when that came around?

Marvin Whitson: Oh yeah. I mean like I said, we lived 50 miles from right here in Welton.

[0:38:00]

Marvin Whitson: I'm telling you where I live now compared up there where we lived, and if you got the flu the doctors made house calls then. You know if you called him on the phone, and said I got the flu, he'd come up there and give you a shot. Of course, you know 50 miles, by the time you went to Union City that was 26 miles, and Dyersburg was 28. I mean you know, if you had to do some doing around to get over there to see us.

Shane Watson: So I'm guessing you guys didn't have too many incidents where you guys called the horse and buggy, and got someone to come out.

Marvin Whitson: Oh no, like I said, it wasn't like we'd get hurt, get cut, or something, something happen, she'd say oh you're going to live.

She'd say you're going to live. You're alright, you'll be alright for your marriage twice.

Shane Watson: Well I'll say that your stories have been very interesting today. I've learned a lot, more than I ever thought I would, and I want to thank you for letting us do this interview today.

Marvin Whitson: Yeah, I've enjoyed talking to you.

[0:39:00]

Shane Watson: Thank you.

[Off Mic Talk]

Shane Watson 2: Well thank you again.

Marvin Whitson: Y'all are welcome. There were cotton wood trees stood up there, and that tree was probably 400 years old. That tree was about 7'2". That was the biggest cotton wood tree in North America.

Shane Watson: Really?

[End of Audio]