

The Story of My Life
by
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My father was Richard Franklin Whitten, born in Pennsylvania, and my mother was Sarah Davey, born in England. I was second in line of my father's family of four sons. My eldest brother died. My mother remarried when I was five years old and she had five boys and one girl.

In May 1852 my parents started across the plains west from Newport, Kentucky, my birthplace. I was a year old and my older brother Edward was three. We joined a train of approximately 40 wagons headed for Oregon, Canada and California. Nine hundred dollars and two yokes of oxen, that is four steers, totaled our traveling assets. When three of our oxen died, my father burnt our brand-new wagon and all its contents, preventing Indian plunder. Dissension between the wagon trains and Indian tribes gave cause to this so as not to prompt more lust for the acquisition of the travelers' supplies, weaponry and ammunition. We joined forces with another man on our train who also lost three of his oxen and journeyed on.

My father settled in Oregon City, Oregon. A little later we lived on a small farm four miles west in the woods of Oregon City. I was about four years old when my father died. He was fishing salmon in the Willamette River. The salmon was a large one and he had quite a time getting the salmon out. Finally, in his struggle, the salmon jerked my father into the river and he drowned (Oregon City Falls). People drug the river for nine days, but never did find his body.

When I got large enough to work I did almost everything I could think of to get out of working. I liked to carry Dad's old gun and hunt birds and deer.

Schools weren't very well organized in those days and we children did well if we went to school three months out of the year. The highest I ever went was fourth grade. I was not studious, but I was a very bashful lad. I never had a fight in my life, but I did tell a few lies. I rode to Portland in a boat when I was four years old, as there wasn't a good road then. I also saw my first steamboat there.

I was twenty-six years old when I met my wife. She had come west from Nebraska to visit her sister and brother-in-law. She was 18 years old and we were married on September 28, 1877. All our children were born on that farm. We lived on a farm in Oswego, Oregon. All our children were born on that farm. There were: Adda Helen, Frank Everett, Zena Belle, Ethel, and George Leslie (Pete). None of our children went to high school or graduated from grade school.

My wife died when Addie was twelve years old, the youngest was one year. She died from a fall she had when she was papering the house. The table upset with her. She died in August of 1892. She was sickly three months before she died. As Addie was the oldest, she filled in as mother and cook.

There wasn't much entertainment in those days, but there was a few dances or gatherings the children went to in wagons. Sometimes they went to church, although we were not members of any denomination.

All of my children were married but the youngest boy, Pete. He died of typhoid fever when he was nineteen, in Oswego.

After all my children were grown and married, I went to Medical Springs, Oregon and lived with my son-in-law, Bob Wanker, the first winter. That winter my son Frank and Effie ran the ranch at Oswego. The next year Frank came up and bought a ranch near Pondosa. I sold my ranch and lived with Frank and Effie until Frank died. Effie sold the ranch a few years later in 1941 when Everett, my grandson, died with streptococcus sore throat. After Frank died I went down to Oswego in May and lived with my daughter Addie and six months later I went to Hood River and lived with Clifford, another grandson. A couple of months later I came back to Pondosa and lived with my granddaughter, Mildred Lay and her husband, Urdel. A few months later I moved down with my daughter, Zena Belle.

I broke my hip October 11, 1947. I went to the hospital at the Saint Elizabeth for two weeks and have been bedridden ever since. I danced a jig with Zena a week before that.

I remember Abraham Lincoln and all the presidents since his time. I was ninety years old and on my birthday when I caught the largest salmon, 38 pounds. My favorite book was *Stanley's Adventures in Africa*. I know not much about the Bible.

In the late eighties, Oregon and Washington were still territories. We raised strawberries, potatoes, grain hay, cabbage, pumpkins and squash. We used to get 25 cents for a crate of strawberries.

The little old "Model T" was the first successful car in 1916. I was 54 years old. I was 40 years old when I took my first ride in a car. I never owned a car or a bicycle, nor have I been on the latter. Have never ridden in an airplane. We had an organ and a phonograph and radio but I never saw a television.

I do not use tobacco or snouse. The first time I saw a woman smoke was about 10 years ago. I was 86 years old then. It was at Miller's Café in Baker City, Oregon. I saw my first movie about that same time. Haven't seen many of them. They weren't suitable to amusement, in my way of thinking. I'd rather waste my time fishing. I have seen about four circuses in my time, also five wars have taken place: Civil War, Indian War (Modoc Indians in southern Oregon), Spanish American War, first World War and second World War. I may live to see another war. ("Was champion skunk and coon trapper," quote Bob Wanker.)

I remember back in the days when my stepfather had a nursery. He was in partnership with another man. We didn't raise flowers them days, nor did we have prunes or strawberries. We did have apple trees and plums, apricots, peaches and pears.

When I was a boy I got a kick out of crossing rivers on our horse, but before we'd go across I'd tie a bait and hook to the horse's tail, thus we'd have fish for dinner when we got across the river. I used to swim in the Willamette River, Oswego Lake, and Tualatin River.

In 1915 I rode to eastern Oregon in a box car with my son-in-law, Robert Wanker. Robert was moving everything he owned to Medical Springs. Among his precious belongings were eight or ten swarms of bees, some of which escaped on our journey. Robert had everything packed in

tight and left one corner open enough for me to sit concealed from the conductor. There was a rule that only one person could take passage with the load of furniture, two milk cows, two horses, a few pigs and chickens. Of course, every time the conductor would come around I took refuge in my corner. It was so hot in the box car that we ran one of our handsaws in a crack to get fresh air. One time the conductor came around and almost caught me. Robert sat in one corner with his feet on a trunk sleeping and had left me to fight off the bees. It was indeed a scramble. When we reached Telocaset, Zena Belle was overwhelmed at the beauty of the little place. We shipped the furniture onto a big wagon and rode the rest of the way to Robert's big ranch.

I am the oldest pioneer in Oregon State and at the time I told my story I was ninety-six years old.