

## Couple Celebrates Rare Diamond Anniversary

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*Whitsons Mark Special Day on Tuesday*

**CRESTVIEW HILLS** - Many couples marry for better or worse, but not for good.

Longtime Northern Kentuckians Bill and Fran Whitson have bucked that trend, and will observe their 60th wedding anniversary Tuesday.

Sitting in their comfortable condominium, the Whitsons took time recently to reflect on their marriage, their lives and their accomplishments. But it was also a time to reflect on the tremendous changes and events they've lived through which strengthened their marriage.

The Whitsons became engaged in early 1945 while Bill was home on leave from the Army. He was a Covington native and had known Fran since she moved to the city from Cynthiana a few years before. They bought a ring at Motch Jewelers and then Bill headed back to Europe, where he served as a navigator aboard a B-24 Liberator in the U.S. Army Air Force. The end of the war was in sight; the Allies were encircling the Nazis while the Japanese were being pushed back toward their home island. Separated by an ocean, Bill and Fran started to plan their life together.

On March 25, 1945, Bill began his 15th mission to bomb the underground oil storage at Buchen, Germany. It was his last. His plane was shot down. Bill was blown into the sub-zero air through the open nose hatch of the plane with only one boot on and his chute only partially attached. Nine of the plane's 12-man crew was lost. Bill managed to open his chute and fell to earth to the sound of church bells. It was noon on Palm Sunday.

### Not Knowing Not Uncommon

Fran was working in Cincinnati at Union Central as a clerk. She wasn't aware of what had happened. She did know that his daily letters to her and his family had stopped. Worries set in. However, she was comforted.

"Everyone had someone or some part in the war. Living with the not knowing wasn't unique. It was very supportive at work and home," she said. On April 11, she received notice that Bill had been classified missing in action (MIA), then shortly thereafter that he was a prisoner of war (POW).

Bill spent this time being nursed back to health in a Luftwaffe hospital and then in a German POW camp until the Russians liberated him and 9,000 other Allied soldiers.

On Aug. 23 of that same year, they married.

Like most newlyweds they were eager to start their new life together. They bought a house in the suburbs in time to be a part of the baby boom. They had no idea of the changes that would shape Northern Kentucky and their country.

Bill went to work for his father's business, RJ Whitson & Sons, as a manufacturing representative. Fran worked outside the home until her sons, Scott and Bruce, were born. But the times they were a-changin' and the Whitsons weren't sitting still.

With approximately 4,500 illegal slot machines in Kenton County, Bill helped form the committee in Covington and Kenton County to help clean up the city and entice industry and commerce to the area. When he noticed that low-funded rural schools were rapidly becoming crowded suburban schools, he became chairman of the Better Schools Committee that worked to pass tax levies to fund education in NKY. Both of these initiatives were seismic shifts that permanently changed the landscape of the area.

Bill became active in Democratic politics as well. He served as mayor of Edgewood from 1954 to 1960 and backed Jim Dressman in his race for Kenton County judge-executive.



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**MEMORIES:** Bill and Fran Whitson have 60 years of memories, many of which are captured in their photo album.

### **Life Member of the Airport Board**

It was his connection to Dressman that made him a member of the Kenton County Airport Board, a position that he held for 32 years. While on the board, he was instrumental in the buying of additional land while it was cheap before the rapidly developing area grew and choked off any future growth. He also spearheaded the naming of the airport. For political and marketing reasons he was instrumental in including Cincinnati in the official name "Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport." Now he is a non-voting board member emeritus.

Fran was also involved in the many societal changes that occurred during the Whitsons' long marriage. One of these was the appearance of more women earning their degree and entering the workplace. While her sons were still in school, Fran started taking classes at Thomas More and eventually earned a degree in history in 1971. Ironically, it was the same year their youngest son, Bruce, graduated from Dixie Heights, where she would begin teaching that fall. (Their oldest son Scott graduated from Dixie in 1968.)

Fran began her career at a time of great social upheaval. Even at Dixie Heights, the counter culture had crept into the classroom.

"Having already raised two sons helped in teaching and understanding what was going on," she said.

Not content to rest on her laurels, she then complimented her bachelor's degree with a master of education degree from Xavier University.

Fran retired in 1986 and Bill retired when the family business was sold in 1990. Their children have had children and grandchildren of their own and pursued their own careers. Like many of their generation, the Whitsons have sold their home and downsized to a nice condominium in a nice community.

Reflecting on the last 60 years and the changes they and their world went through, the Whitsons know what made their marriage successful.

"Commitment and endurance," said Fran.

"Adaptability during changing times," added Bill.

They also hark back to what their son's pediatrician once told them, "The world changes, but human nature doesn't."

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