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Top Of The Morning

Bridgewater Man's Routine Boosts Spirits

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By JEREMY HUNT

BRIDGEWATER — Carlyle Whitelow's morning routine says more about him than you might think at first blush.

It speaks to a sort of altruistic and jovial philosophy on life that he says his parents instilled in him and his brother.

Just about every weekday, Whitelow stands out on Bridgewater's Main Street near Mount Crawford Avenue with a big, genuine grin on his face and waves at people as they pass by on their morning commute.



Carlyle Whitelow waves to morning drivers in Bridgewater Monday. (Photo by Nikki Fox / DN-R)

It seems a small gesture, but it means a lot to many people.

"It just brightens your day when you see him," says Monica Pangle, 34, who doesn't personally know Whitelow but has memories of him waving at passing traffic for as long as she can remember.

"It kind of turns me around if I'm having a bad morning," she added.

People have shown their gratitude for Whitelow's kindness — like the time a stranger picked up his bill at an Applebee's and wrote a thank you note on the receipt.

But still, comments like Pangle's both surprise and delight him.

"It's interesting. I didn't realize people were paying that much attention to it," said Whitelow, a former Bridgewater College professor and football, basketball and tennis coach for the

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Eagles. "I didn't realize it was touching that many people."

Whitelow, who has lived in the same house on Mount Crawford Avenue since 1951, says he's "75 or 76" years old.

"Let's put it this way, I'm an old man, and I draw Social Security," he said.

Though not fully aware of the impact he has on commuters, Whitelow says his goal is simple: He wants to make people smile.

"Even if it's just for a split second, just a few split seconds, if I get them to smile, they can't be frowning," he said.

One Thing Led To Another

He didn't just wake up one morning and decide to start waving at cars as they drive by.

In fact, it seems to have happened almost by accident.

This is how Whitelow tells the story of how he came to stand out on the sidewalk between BB&T Bank and Dairy Queen.

It grew out of another morning routine, riding his bicycle around town.

"I ride my bike every morning, rain or shine, sleet or snow," he says.

One day about three years ago, a friend of his, Bobby Shank, saw him on Main Street as Shank drove by in a school bus loaded with students.

Whitelow flashed his signature grin and waved.

The next day, they missed each other, and Shank commented later about how he didn't see Whitelow out on Main Street that day.

"I said, 'What? Am I supposed to be out there every day?'" Whitelow says. "He said, 'Well, I have to drive the bus every day.' ... From then on, I'd been there every morning."

After that, as Shank says, "it just led from one thing to another."

Whitelow discovered that, as he waited for Shank, many other people he knew drove by, and he had to wave and smile at them, too.

More and more people, even many he didn't know before, are waving to him now.

"It seems like I'm adding people to my waving list," he said.

Initially, he did have concerns about what people who didn't know him might think.

"I was worried people thought, 'That's some wayward man,'" he says with a chuckle.

Late last year, that concern seemed to be manifested when a stranger offered him a \$5 bill.

The man told him to take the money because Whitelow makes him smile. Whitelow said he didn't want it. The man insisted.

"I said, 'Take that and put it in your church offering,' and he said, 'You do the same.'"



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Rain Or Shine

Whitelow doesn't let inclement weather get in the way of his morning ritual.

He takes a lot of joy in it, especially seeing the smiling faces of children on Shank's bus.

Pangle described his contagious friendliness as a "talent."

"On a day-to-day basis ... I imagine most of us do deal with people who are unfriendly, and Carlyle alleviates some of the pain that goes with that," said Bob Holton, the town's longtime superintendent.

Holton first met Whitelow nearly 38 years ago when a member of the Bridgewater Town Council took Holton around town to introduce him to people he should know.

"Carlyle's spent the part of his life that I'm aware of basically just doing good," Holton said.

Something that becomes apparent as you talk to Whitelow, a member of the Bridgewater Rotary Club, is his belief in Rotary's motto of service above self.

Parents' Lesson

Since retiring from Bridgewater College in 1997, Whitelow keeps himself busy by serving as treasurer at his church, John Wesley United Methodist, and on the boards of directors of local nonprofits, including the Salvation Army.

Whitelow said his parents, Faith and Muriel, taught him and his brother, Alfred, the importance of serving others and making them happy.

It's a reputation the entire family has earned over the years.

In 1995, Bridgewater College honored the Whitelows with its Outstanding Service Award.

Faith Whitelow worked at the college from age 19 until his death in 1952. His wife joined him there and also later worked in the kitchen at the Bridgewater Retirement Community.

Carlyle and Alfred Whitelow were the college's first black students who entered as freshmen to graduate from BC.

After his father's death, Carlyle Whitelow made up his mind to take care of his mother for the rest of her life.

He made good on his promise and was there for his mother until her death in 2006.

Any time he earns accolades, Whitelow says, he tries to put the focus on other people. He thanks God, his parents, his brother and Bridgewater College.

He wants others to be honored rather than himself, he says.

If you joke with him that his brother got the good looks out of the two of them, he'll laugh and say, "You're right. That's good."

"I always tell my students their first day in class," he says, "... whatever they do, they're going to be in service of others."

Contact Jeremy Hunt at 574-6273 or jhunt@dnronline.com

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