

THE WHIP MOUNTAIN SAGA

taken from his biography

DON'T HEAD 'EM OFF AT THE PASS BOYS, LET'S
SHOOT 'EM
IN THE BACK RIGHT HERE

by

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Chapter One

Perhaps you don't remember the name of Whip Mountain from early western films, but you remember seeing him. Sure you do.

Think back to when you were a kid at any of the Saturday matinee western thrillers, and there he was. . . the rather portly guy in the background with an evil face. He's got a bushy black mustache and a wicked scar on his cheek. He's always a member of the bad guy's gang, and he looks like he does his boss's bidding not just for the pay, but because he really, REALLY enjoys inflicting evil on the guy wearing the white hat. *Now* do you remember?

Whether he's waiting to ambush Gene, or Roy or Hoppy, or burning crops, or kidnapping the beautiful love interest, who is bashfully called "Missy Ma'am" by the hero; Whip is always lurking nearby, just dripping badness.

From about 1938 on, it was practically illegal to film a western without Whip Mountain in it. In a genre of 100% stereotyped roles, this was arguably the single face that always set the character of the movie.

The gang leader, nominally the saloon keeper, wasn't bad looking. He had a neat trick mustache, kind of wavy hair, and acted courteously toward the ladies. He wore a nifty black Stetson, and his hobby was stealing other people's ranches.

The heroes were purity taken to the edge of saintliness. They drove herds all day in fancy western regalia and never picked up a speck of dust or got a crease in their britches.

They sang! All of their friends in the bunkhouse sang! Sometimes they all sang together, and sometimes Gene or Roy would sing solo to the Missy Ma'am, or their horse. . . interchangeably.

But without Whip Mountain's scowl, his skulking (he really skulked beautifully) and aura of evil, there would have been no point to the movie. No tension, no rising action, no nothing. The film needed him constantly reminding everyone in the audience that the sick fog of disaster was waiting for the white hat right around the next boulder.

He was, of course, always in the background, as the chief of the bad guy's nasty brigade. Yet, over the years, he won the grudging respect of even the stars. It has been reported that Lash Larue, no relation to Whip said at the time, "Whip really deserves to be in the background." Or words to that effect anyway.

Our anti-hero seemed to be created solely for his profession. He was born Errol Himmelberg in the small town of Chicopee, Massachusetts. That's about as far from the old west as it is possible to get. His mother however, later claimed a sort of western tie-in for the family because his Uncle Bernie used a horse to pull his fruit and vegetable

wagon after he had moved up financially from the pushcart. As proof they had even shown a picture of Errol as a small child with the horse. In the photo, the horse looks uncomfortable.

On the day of his birth, the doctor took one look at the newborn trying out a smirk for the first time. The doctor clearly remembered that he never again got such satisfaction out of smacking a kid on the butt.

Little Errol had a face only a mother could love. He always looked to others as if he were just about to steal, bully, damage or set a fire. The fact is that he never actually did any of these things, but that mattered not in the slightest to the hometowners.

There is a joke making the rounds that an overprotective and doting mother told a teacher, "Jimmy, my son is a wonderful little boy, but very sensitive. If he acts up, just slap the little boy next to him and he'll be good as gold." This is actually a true story, and the little boy next to darling Jimmy, was Errol.

Not that the teacher needed encouragement to try smacking that sneer from his face. The only reason his skull wasn't permanently deformed was that she was ambidextrous, and alternated right and left handed slaps.

As he grew older, the sneer on the Himmelberg boy's lips was gradually augmented by a scowl. He became so evil looking that the other kids ran away at the sight of him. His teachers stopped slapping him around and fearfully begged to have him transferred out of their classes. Even Uncle Bernie's horse couldn't stand him by this time.

A weaker kid would have spent a life emotionally scarred but Errol figured out that being feared and hated had some advantages. For instance, he never had to do a lick of work in school. At the end of each year, he was passed along, several times with double promotions, so eventually he graduated from high school at the age of fifteen.

Jobs were hard to get in 1933, especially for a kid whose reputation preceded him. Shopkeepers, seeing him coming, would lock their doors and hang out the "closed" sign.

And so, after more than a few fruitless years of job searching in the local area, our hero decided to move as far away from Chicopee as it was possible to get. The town staged a gigantic going away party in his honor. It was held the day after they were certain he had left.

Traveling was sort of easy and cheap in those days; a quick run, a leap onto an open freight car and the journey had begun.

The railroad police or bulls were never a bother. They'd take one look at Errol be scared out of their wits and leave him alone.

Food was also no problem. He'd hop off the train, wander into the hobo jungle looking hungry and fierce. He was always fed.

Eventually one morning, he found himself in California, with several hundred other job seekers at the Republic Pictures film studios seeking work as stage hands or day laborers.

Perhaps it was sheer luck, or maybe it was because wherever Errol stood, people moved out of his personal space, leaving him as obvious as a sore and ugly thumb. In any case, a producer was passing by. He stopped, shaken at the sight of pure malice and immediately told Errol that he was hired as an extra.

Errol never asked what kind of work an extra was expected to do. He just glommed onto the words "you're hired".

In no time at all, he was standing on a fake street of a fake western town, wearing a fake mustache and dressed, like all the others, as a fake cowboy.

He even was given a line to say, just after the nefarious saloon keeper gave his gang their marching, or rather riding orders, he was to say: "All right boys, let's head him off at the pass."

The line was not well spoken, and the director yelled "cut." He berated the speaker in demeaning terms and wondered aloud who ever had told this guy he was an actor (actually nobody had.)

But you didn't treat Errol Himmelberg with disrespect. He repeated his line again looking at the director sitting beside the camera with the unmistakeable message in his menacing eye that this twerp would die an exquisitely painful death begging to be put out of his misery if he said one more disrespectful word. Errol had a low threshold for others mouthing off to him.

There was a breathless pause, then a falsetto squeak from a broken man, "cut . . . and print."

The next scene featured the gang, Errol in the lead, leaping onto their horse's backs and galloping out of town. The brand new thespian, now enthused by the job and promise of money leaped a little too high and vaulted right over the horse, doing a one-and-a-half somersault, and falling in the dust on the other side. Under any other circumstances it might have been considered almost graceful.

On the next take he did manage to get in the saddle and stay on for three or four yards before falling.

The director felt he had no choice but to get some underling to fire this tenderfoot while he was safely far away. But the producer convinced him that you didn't bump into such a classic criminal type talent every day. Surely something could be done.

So they solved the problem by surreptitiously putting a strong glue on his saddle. The scene went off perfectly and, in the next few days, Errol did learn to keep his seat on a horse. Walking around with a saddle stuck to your pants made the learning process fairly easy.

So, what was originally a one day job turned into steady work. Audiences felt a delightful shiver whenever they saw him on screen, the embodiment of everything vile and rotten. By this time, he had grown a real mustache even more wicked looking than the fake one.

He did have to change his name though. the studio head said that he couldn't be listed on the credits as Errol Himmelberg. In the first place, Hollywood already had a couple of Errols (Errol Flynn and Leon Errol). Even one Errol was enough, maybe too much. Himmelberg was too long for a background cowboy anyway, and way too Jewish. Whoever heard of a Jewish cowboy? And "no," they told him, "your Uncle Bernie's owning a horse doesn't make you a cowboy."

So, they just listed him as E. Berg. Later they had the idea of changing his name from Berg to Mountain, the translation from the German.

Still, although he could stay in the saddle practically all of the time, he never did fully like or trust riding the spirited horse he had been given. So they found a half lame nag in the back of the stables. The head wrangler playfully called him "Lightning," because he said it usually took a cattle prod to make him move at all.

This turned out to be a match made in heaven. The first time E. met Lightning, he looked the horse in the eye and said:

"You won't buck or anything, will you?"

Lightning whinnied.

E. answered: "That's great! Frankly, I was scared to death of the other horse."

Lightning snorted and whinnied again.

E. responded quickly "No, I can't help it. That's just the way I look. But I'm really sort of a coward."

Suddenly, he realized he understood everything the horse was saying. Perhaps it was two downtrodden souls getting together. Or it may have been that people just didn't talk to him unless it was absolutely necessary, and that left the field open to his talent for

communicating with an animal. But this was a beginning of a lifetime of understanding between them.

From now on in this narrative, all conversations with Lightning will be translated from Horse to English.

On his fourth film for Republic, some property man looped a bull whip around the horn of E's saddle. He figured this would add to his despicable image. When a villain carried a whip, it signaled to the audience a willingness, even an eagerness to flog a man, or worse, a horse to death.

Now, sometimes the good guys carried whips, but that was entirely different. In the case of heroes, they rarely used a whip except to gently encircle the dainty waist of the Missy Ma'am to reel her in close enough to sing to. Cowboys never needed a whip with their horses. They would come near as soon as they heard the first twang of the electric guitar.

Horses were trained to do this. Missy Ma'ams were, for the most part, untrainable, hence the waist whip maneuver. By the way, haven't you ever wondered where the Sons of the Pioneers found outlets for their electric guitars on the prairie? Never mind, forget that.

Anyway, E. took to fooling around with the whip between takes. He tried and tried, but seemed unsuccessful in achieving a satisfying crack out of it. The best sound he could get was a dull "thup." That is until the day the weapon recoiled accidentally in his face. He always said that, due to the pain, he never remembered the only true "snap" he ever made. But it did give him the wicked scar for which he was to become famous.

He took some good natured ribbing from the cast, mostly other mean looking gents, who began calling him "Whip." The name stuck, and he now assumed his final incarnation as Whip Mountain, a name destined by fate to strike terror in any heart. It looked good on the credits too.

For the rest of his story, we will rely on the remembrances of his future wife and biographer. Yes, he did marry, but more about this at the proper time.

Fortune continued to beam down on Whip. He was employed steadily as a background cowboy. Sometimes he had a few lines to say, other times not. But he was making money, and by his standards, hand over fist.

From living in flophouses, he moved first to a neat apartment, then a home, then eventually a mansion.

During his rise, he was considered by some though, as mildly eccentric. Before every take, for instance, he and Lightning would move off by themselves and the cast would see him talking quietly but earnestly to the horse, who would whinny from time to time.

Some thought Whip was just calming down a high strung animal. Others who were familiar with Lightning knew that a “high strung” episode for him might mean breathing more than once a minute.

Whip later confessed to his wife that he was actually taking acting lessons from Lightning. A typical lesson would go like this:

Whip: “Aren’t I supposed to consider my motivation? I don’t know what my motivation is.”

Lightning: “Forget about that actor crap. Your motivation is to collect your money and get out of here. My motivation is to get a bag of oats. Why in the world are you having such trouble with this? It’s simple!”

Whip: “Yeah, but after the take, I can always see how I could have done it better, maybe snarling a little more or something. It’s this constant dissatisfaction that gets me down. You know?”

Lightning: “You really want to talk about dissatisfaction? What about me? Do you think it’s pleasant, always having to work under you? You’re not getting any lighter Pudgy Boy. And I’m getting *PRET-TY* tired of having to carry you through every scene.”

Whip: “Okay, don’t get a spur under your saddle. Anyway, I’m glad we had this talk. I feel lots better and I really didn’t mean anything I said.”

Lightning: “You’re welcome, but I meant everything I said.”

With his increasing good fortune, and with folding money in his jeans, Whip cast his famous evil eye in the direction of the ladies. Why shouldn’t this be so? Take away his nasty features and he was just like any other average guy.

The studio’s publicity staff tried to help by attempting to line him up with any number of new, cutesy minimum salary ingenues. They had no luck. Each of the girls expressed mild reluctance at the prospect of being seen with him at a Hollywood night club. As one remarked in an offhand manner. “I’d rather date his horse. He’s better looking and probably more intelligent.”

Yet fate stepped in again and solved Whip’s companionship problem. Late one afternoon as he was hurrying to leave the set, he got to a corner and ran headlong into a ravishing creature running in the opposite direction. They both went down and her thick glasses flew off her face into the street. After disentangling themselves Whip apologized profusely. He now showed concern for another human being for the first time in his life. He tried to soften his forbidding appearance. It was unsuccessful. Yet she didn’t seem to be frightened, but peered and squinted in his direction, and actually smiled. He knew immediately that she was blind as a bat without her glasses.

And that was how he first met Darlene Sweet, a starlet who had never quite made it big in the movie business despite her beauty.

As he helped her to her feet, the touch of her hand in his, sent an electric shock through his body. There was a moment of silence, broken finally by a faint sigh from her, then the rustle of her Missy Ma'am costume as he helped her up, and finally the delicate tinkling sound of his boots grinding her glasses into splinters.

This was obviously not love at first sight. It did however tend to prove the adage that love is blind. Darlene became infatuated with Whip. She didn't understand why the movie audiences viewed him with loathing, when he was her hero.

Whip did everything he could to keep her from seeing him clearly. He convinced her that she should never wear glasses. Why take attention away from her beautiful baby blues?

If she said she wanted to read a book, he asked why? He'd never actually completed a book, and yet he had graduated from high school at fifteen.

If she complained that she couldn't get along in everyday life with such bad eyes, he assured her that he saw well enough for the both of them, and he could lead her anywhere she needed to go.

In short, her defenses were worn down, and to prevent the constant bumping into walls, she agreed to marry him. The ceremony was unforgettable for the bride. She had never seen her mother quite so emotional. Darlene thought they were tears of joy. Did we mention that Darlene was intellectually challenged? Did we also mention that her mother had excellent eyesight?

In any case, many years passed and their marriage endured until the end of his life. Whip felt that the time had gone by in a blur of love. Darlene thought that the time had merely gone by in a blur.

On the one and only occasion that he cast a tentative eye toward a new lady, Lightning was the one who dissuaded him from making the first move. By now a famous if minor western character actor, he considered the horse to be not only his acting coach and manager, but his best and only male friend in the world. And this friend gave him the one piece of advice he would never forget.

"Look here kid, if there's anybody who knows about sowing wild oats, it's me, and I'm telling you this is definitely not worth it. Stick with what you've got. Your wife is perfect for you. She's so beautiful, so loving. . .so near-sighted. You're living the best of all possible lives."

In truth, Whip finally realized that between Darlene and Lightning, nothing in the world could harm him. They structured his life, removed impediments and offered emotional

support. But, for several years, Darlene was completely unaware of her husband's relationship with his horse.

The time finally came though when, one day, she was moaning about her own rotten luck career. Work wasn't forthcoming, and even when she was called in for a test, she was never selected for the part. The simple reason was, of course, a complete lack of acting ability.

Whip hesitantly suggested she might profit by a few lessons from his own dramatic coach and artist's representative, Lightning.

Darlene thought Whip was either making fun of her, or had taken leave of his senses, but once he convinced her that he was both serious and sane, she agreed to meet Lightning for an audition.

Still, on the ride out to the stables, she had misgivings.

"But Honey, how do we explain this to our friends, your speaking to a horse and all?"

"Do like I've always done, don't say anything to anyone."

"How could Lightning have anything of value to tell me?"

"Are you kidding? He's been at Republic longer than both of us put together. He's a veteran."

"Anyway, I don't speak Horse."

"I'll translate."

"Still, we'll be the only two actors in Hollywood with a horse for a dramatic coach."

"Not true! He also coaches Trigger, with Roy's help of course."

"Come on, now you're putting me down. I'm smarter than Trigger."

"Trigger can add six and five. Can you?"

To her credit, Darlene got the answer right on only the second guess, and, despite her initial misgivings, she eventually learned to trust and even feel affection for their coach and manager.

From the very first, Lightning was brutally truthful about her acting talent, and she had no choice but to believe him. Still, he got her jobs through Whip. She usually played the

part of the innocent dance hall girl killed in the first shot by one of the henchmen, normally Whip himself. She goes down with a pitiful whinny and spends the rest of the scene in character as a corpse. This found her steady, if low paying work. The dying whinny, however, taught to her by her acting teacher, became a trademark of sorts. It could bring tears to the littlest girl and the strongest hulk of a man in the theatre.

And, when she could, she sat quietly in the background as Lightning and Roy Rogers continued to train Trigger to count. Yes, it seems that Roy was the only other human who could understand Horse. He'd never admitted it to anyone, because he was afraid that the crowd would think of him as a lunatic. But together they both taught Roy's mount to stomp the ground with his hoof, and with the correct answer to any addition and subtraction problems.

From the mathematics lessons she learned by observation, the cowboy's faithful spouse took it upon herself to keep his books, and found it very satisfying to be at least on the perimeter of the movie industry, helping her husband's career. Each day, she would put a table out on the lawn and start adding columns of figures she saw through a large magnifying glass while stomping on the ground with her feet. She loved the work and couldn't help singing at the top of her lungs as she stomped. Actually, Darlene had a lovely voice which she had never bothered to cultivate until now.

Of course, she never dared look at Whip through the glass, as he had convinced her that she would give him the evil eye if she did.

They were, as a wealthy couple, subjected to yearly audits by the I.R.S., but Darlene managed to convince them of the couple's honesty every time she and Whip appeared at their offices. She used her right leg as credits and the left as debits. Watching her jumping and stomping while singing her explanation of the books, federal agent Joe Trujillo mentioned that she had the most graceful audit he'd ever seen. She reminded him of the flamenco troupes he'd admired when he visited relatives in Madrid. This remark was directly responsible for her next and real career as a famous flamenco dancer.

She renamed herself "Dolores," for stage purposes, bought a set of castanets and started a dance troupe which was eventually booked at some of the biggest and best nightclubs and theaters in the country.

Together Darlene and Whip were living the great American life. But things almost always change, and Whip who could see it coming, was unable to find a way to stop it.

The stereotypical western movies began to slip in popularity. They were no longer the black and white good guys versus bad guys stories the audiences had loved. Now, the characters were beset with personality and depression problems, and with many shades of gray. There were no more shoot-'em-ups. Now it was a matter of "Do I fire or would it perhaps be better to refer him to a psychiatric counselor?"

Whip had learned to love the old times. They had made him wealthy enough to live the high life, thanks to the clever investments Lightning had advised for Darlene and him. What really bothered him was the loss of a place to go to every day.

Regretfully, the final shooting day of the final movie arrived, and the inevitable line was spoken, this time by the saloon keeper himself. . . "All right boys, let's head them off at the pass."

Whip just couldn't lose this last opportunity to show how really vicious his character was. Suddenly, he came out with the most famous ad lib of the early westerns. "Don't head 'em off at the pass boys, let's just shoot 'em in the back right here."

Of course, the head bad guy saved the day by arguing that he wanted to be at the pass so as to look Gene and his buckaroos in the eyes as they went down. But this ad lib was so rotten, so shocking, it was kept in the scene, and later inspired the title of his biography.

And so, Whip slid into involuntary retirement. He certainly had the funds to do as he pleased, not even counting the money Darlene was raking in with her flamenco dancing.

But time was indeed hanging heavy and he was constantly searching for some activities to occupy his mind, and this restlessness was what ultimately led to his last and best career move.

A spur-of-the-moment notion one night, caused him to buy a ringside seat at a wrestling match. In the days around the close of World War Two, wrestling was a fading sport, even with the advent of television. It only interested a few fans; people who seemed to get some sort of entertainment value from watching one expressionless pug get a toe hold on another expressionless pug and sit there in that position for a full ten minutes.

One thing a cowboy, even a cowboy in the background understands is that all the world's a stage, even if the stage is square and has ropes around the edges. And these guys were dying on that stage.

Whip watched silently for as long as he could take it, then he leaned over toward the contestants who happened to be tangled up right in front of him.

He said to the guy on top, "hey you jerk, some kind of bad guy you are. Come on, scowl, sneer and swear. And you, what kind of victim are you? You're supposed to be in agony. Scream damn you, SCREAM!"

Both men looked at the vicious, scarred face and felt the fear it engendered, and they obeyed. One grabbed and twisted. . . and twisted some more. He roared, cursed and promised to tear his opponent's leg from its' socket. The other shrieked like a firetruck siren.

The stadium erupted in sound. A couple of fans began shouting for the villain to kill the hero. The outcry was soon joined by three distinct groups of partisans. Those who were encouraging the bad guy. Those who were telling the good guy not to give up, and the third group the largest, wanted to tear the villain apart with their own hands.

The place was in pandemonium. Hysteria reigned supreme. Whip saw what he had wrought. And it was good! He sneered in joy.

For now he realized that the western genre he had embraced hadn't died. It had only to transfer to a different venue. The stereotypes, the good versus bad characters, and the limited plots were still there, waiting to be brought back to life in professional wrestling. And he would be the one who would shape this resurrection.

Chapter Two

Whip became an entrepreneur. He quickly signed both these wrestlers to contracts. The evil type was renamed "The Cursed Barbarian," and he would be personally retrained in a true cowboy-in-the-background image. The good guy became "The All American Hope." His new biography had him pictured as a returning war hero, which he would undoubtedly have been if he hadn't failed his physical due to fallen arches. The new sports promoter put this one under the tutelage of an unemployed second tier western hero, who would now be in charge of all good looking, pure of heart grappling heroes. Whip, of course got a cut of the profits of both camps.

They set to work with the first two athletes.

The hero learned to smile benignly and playfully ruffle the hair of a small, freckle faced boy (rented out by his parents) as he marched down the aisle to the site of combat.

The villain learned to moosh the face of a Casper Milquetoast type (a professional stunt man) on his way down the same aisle.

The hero was taught to vault gracefully over the top rope of the ring.

The villain practiced hitting him below the belt, before his feet hit the ground on the vault.

The hero developed the ability to go "deaf" to the crowd so that he didn't hear their warnings that the bad guy was sneaking up on him.

The hero, when he won, modestly attributed his success to his Mom, clean living and faith in the American flag.

The villain learned to be a sore loser, except when he won. *Then*, he became a sore winner.

The first matches between these two became the stuff of legend. Almost deserted arenas were now filled to capacity, as a new brand of fan embraced what became a new brand of “sport.” It was, of course a show more than a sport, but on occasion, it could still get rough. If your opponent was careless when he body slammed you, it was possible to get a mat burn which might require a bandaid. That didn’t happen often though, as long as the contestants stuck to the script and were properly rehearsed.

The original nucleus of two wrestlers grew, as the newly formed “Galactic Wrestling Alliance” emerged. Whip found his nasties in all sorts of places. He personally scouted big city cab drivers, subway token vendors, and Jewish delicatessen waiters. These and others became the raw material for the growing stable of hopefuls. Dentists were especially good, once they got over the idea of anesthesia for pain.

The “saints” as he called them had a simple type of audition. They were dressed in dark blue suits and told to walk back and forth outside on blisteringly hot days. After three or four hours, the one or two applicants who didn’t break a sweat and hadn’t creased the suits were selected for wrestling heroes training school.

The auditions for bad guys were somewhat more involved. They were held at the back of Whip and Darlene’s estate, in front of Lightning’s new quarters. If anyone questioned why they were to be auditioned there, Whip would growl, “you want to join my stable? Alright, this here is a stable, now show me how nasty you can be.” None of them ever commented on the horse looking on from his stall. They never suspected that it was actually the horse running the audition.

The newly created “Commissioner” of the Galactic Wrestling Alliance was now making all sorts of plans for the future. He had one idea of offering scholarships to talented high school bullies.

Lightning put an immediate stop to that idea. His reasoning: “Those kids are not just playing. They’re nasty for real. We want *our* scum to be gentlemen.”

In fact, it was mostly the horse who fleshed out the growing empire with his creative innovations.

He designed the fireworks, smoke and trumpet fanfares to accompany the heroes’ appearances in the halls of combat. And it was a great idea to license a world of trinkets sold to the growing, adoring public.

But perhaps his most inspired idea was that each wrestler needed his own personal beautiful female “fight attendant.” This was tried out with Darlene in the role on several nights when her dance troupe was not performing. They dressed her in a sketchy, extremely slutty costume, showing acres of décolletage. She wore a flaming red wig and was billed as “Lucinda Borgia, the Venetian Madwoman.” She brought down the house when she appeared on the arm of the Cursed Barbarian. In reality, he was her seeing eye man.

The idea of beautiful ladies caught on, but Darlene couldn't. First of all, her schedule didn't allow for a permanent job, and second, she refused to believe that these exhibitions weren't real fights. On at least two occasions when the opposition got "her man" down, she leaped into the ring and attempted to scratch his eyes out. The good guy finally rebelled, because she had gone too far. "She hurt me" he whined, "and I'm just not used to that kind of treatment."

But, her appearances were enough to prove the point. From then on a girl was hired to accompany each wrestler. The bad girls were raven haired and dressed in daring low cut costumes. The good girls, all blondes, were also in low cut costumes, but made of gingham with lots of ruffles. Of course, no gentleman would try to peer down the bodices of the good girls' dresses. The bad girls were fair game though.

And so, Whip, born Errol Himmelberg in Chicopee Massachusetts, was credited with inventing a modern American institution. He finished his life a happy, wealthy and fulfilled individual.

Even his untimely death at a relatively early age was quick and entirely unanticipated. It happened at a charity affair when a noted religious icon looked at him and said "God loves you and so do I." To be grateful would certainly not match his persona, so Whip glared at the preacher. The holy man continued to stare at him and smile. Whip thought he had lost his vicious appearance, and promptly had the one and only heart attack he would ever need.

Remember, this was all before contact lenses became popular, so neither Darlene or the preacher ever actually got a real look at him, and this can definitely be called a blessing. Whip had never imagined that the reverend's eyesight could be as bad as his wife's.

At the funeral, Darlene was the center of attraction in the large crowd, dressed for mourning in a black, Edith Head designed Missy Ma'am costume. Lightning also attended, walking alongside her to the gravesite and wearing a black saddle with a pair of Levis glued to it to memorialize the humble beginnings of a film legend. She clung to him in an outward show of grief. Actually he was her seeing eye horse.

In the years since, she has, of course, finished her biography of a beloved husband, giving due credit to her collaborator. And her dance troupe has continued to thrive.

To complete Whip's biography, she hunted and pecked tirelessly with a small, portable typewriter but truth be known, her input on the finished book was really minor, since the typewriter somewhere along the way had lost its ribbon. She actually couldn't see that all the pages were blank. Lightning, writing under the pen name of H. Blitzen actually completed the book, using Darlene's reminiscences as reference material. Before starting, he arranged for a new fangled, custom built word processor. The keyboard by necessity is as large as a barn door.

Lightning lived to a ripe old age and kept up his activities until the end. At the conclusion of his life, he worked tirelessly to complete the definitive biography of Trigger by the date demanded of his long time publisher, Random House.