

# Driving their dreams

Villager writes book about racing son and grandson

The Mix In The Villages South  
Saturday, July 6, 2013  
By Brittany Van Heyningen

The thought of writing a book never crossed Pennie Whitt's mind. However, since moving to her Village of Hemingway home, Whitt has found herself trying things to which she never gave a second thought before.

"I have never played pickleball before. I do now," Whitt said. "I have never played water volleyball before. I do now. I've never played billiards before. I do now. I've never done ceramics before. I do now. And I've never written a book. It's because I'm in The Villages. I have the opportunity to."

The idea of writing a few short stories about her children and grandchildren sounded appealing, so Whitt got to writing. She ended up with about five stories, each about a page and a half long.

In need of critiques, Whitt took her stories to a book club.

I told them all the different stories about my kids in the backyard, slip and sliding with the dog," Whitt recalled. "Then when I told them about my grandson racing, they said, unanimously, that's what they wanted to hear."

After reading the story to the group, the questions and critiques started pouring in.

"They started asking, 'What did he look like? What did he say? What did he feel? What was he thinking?'" Whitt recalled.



With so many questions needing answers, Whitt found herself delving deeper into her story. It quickly grew from a page and a half to more than 100 pages.

The story revolves around Whitt's son, Jeff Simmons, and her grandson, J.J. Simmons.

Jeff grew up racing anything that had wheels, and passed his love of the sport on to his son. J.J., now an American Sprint Car Series driver, grew up watching races until he was old enough to get behind the wheel.

Once he could drive, there was no turning back.

"Every weekend it's racing, and when they're not racing, they're working on the cars," Whitt said. "J.J. has had so many cars, it's amazing."

When Whitt informed the father and son she was writing their story, they were shocked.

"They said, 'Really?!' And I said, 'Yes! I'm really proud of you guys!'" Whitt said.

As Whitt started writing more about the story of her son and grandson, she had several conversations with them about racing life.

"I said, 'What did you say to J.J. as he was leaving, as he was driving onto the track?'" Whitt said, referring to a phone conversation she had with Jeff while doing research for her book. "(He told me) he said, 'Be safe. I love you. Have fun.'"

Since she had brought up a son who loved racing, Whitt knew just how dangerous the sport could be. Thankfully, she discovered that Jeff, who is the race car owner, stays up to date with all the latest and greatest safety equipment.

"My son spares no money on buying the best equipment and the restraints and the fireproof everything," Whitt said. "If something new comes out, he gets it. He does a good job of keeping my grandson safe."

In addition to the book, Whitt also decided to write a song about Jeff and J.J.'s love of racing.

"The song basically follows the story line of the book," explained Dan Fiddick, Whitt's life partner.

With the help of Fiddick and a friend's recording studio, Whitt created a CD to complement her book.

"We burned a bunch of the CDs for the song and then designed the label," Fiddick said.

"I couldn't have done it without Dan, that's for sure," Whitt said.

Whitt's book, "Driving My Dream," will be available for purchase later this month on [racecarkid.com](http://racecarkid.com) and [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). Pre-orders can be placed by emailing [drivingmydream@aol.com](mailto:drivingmydream@aol.com).

"I'm really excited about the book coming out because I'm proud of my son and my grandson," Whitt said.