

# The Artist Was Finished

By PAUL J. SCHARF

Norma Whitcomb loved to view her life as the work of “the Master Artist.”<sup>i</sup>

Art was very important to her. She studied, taught and practiced it, but—more than that—it really defined her life. And she certainly had many colorful experiences!

Norma grew up during the Great Depression and World War II. She married two veterans of that war, providing each with a loving home and serving alongside each of them in two very different ministries.

Her first husband, Robert Pritchett, took her initially to Dallas Theological Seminary, and then to the Philippines, serving with China Inland Mission (which became Overseas Missionary Fellowship during that time), where they raised their two boys on the mission field, living a spartan existence.

After 11 years of devoted service, the Far Eastern Bible Institute and Seminary sent both Robert and Norma to study at Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Ind. He would pursue his doctorate of theology and she would finish her master’s degree, as both would prepare to teach students back in the Philippines.

But Robert died of a heart attack as he was jogging one night during their first year back in school. As the director of the doctoral program, Dr. John C. Whitcomb went along with law enforcement to inform Norma of the tragedy. The next morning, she had to tell her sons that their dad was with the Lord.

Dr. Whitcomb’s own wife Edisene was dying of a rare autoimmune liver disease, and Dr. Whitcomb was spending his days teaching seminary classes in the morning and driving back and forth to the hospital in Chicago in the afternoon and evening, all the while trying to care for his four growing children. Before Edisene went to heaven, she told her husband candidly that Norma should be considered for the role of wife and mother in their home.

So, when Dr. Whitcomb later asked Norma to accompany him on a drive, she did not even realize that it was a date. However, it ended with a proposal and—without even being sure of what had happened—she had accepted.

The Whitcombs were married on Jan. 1, 1971. Amazingly, this second marriage for both partners had surpassed its 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary when Dr. Whitcomb went to be with the Lord in February of 2020.

Her second husband was in the midst of a 39-year teaching career at Grace Seminary when they married, and he took Norma to the ends of the Earth—only this time on shorter trips.

The Whitcombs had a combined total of six children between the ages of 10 and 16 when they got married, and you might think that would have been enough to keep Norma busy. That would only mean that you didn't know Norma!

Along with ministering to her family, church and the seminary wives, she helped meet the need for greater household income by buying, renovating and renting properties. Laziness was not one of Norma's temptations, nor was fear.

My wife Lynnette and I visited the Whitcombs in their home for the first time in 2003. At that point, I had known Dr. Whitcomb as my seminary professor for nine years, and desired to write his biography for a magazine article.<sup>ii</sup>

But I had never met Norma. I only knew that she was soon to be 80 years old and faced some health struggles. I had heard her mentioned often, but was not sure what to expect. Was I ever surprised when a very energetic lady, looking much younger than her years, answered the door holding her beloved poodle in her arms, smiling from ear to ear!

Norma loved to practice hospitality, and she loved everything about the ministries that God had given her with both of her husbands. She was equally as comfortable on the mission field as she was in a seminary environment, or selling books at a Bible conference—or even attending a lavish banquet.

Most of all, Norma cherished the relationship that she had with her Heavenly Father. When I stayed in the Whitcombs' home on numerous occasions, I would often be up working late—long after Dr. Whitcomb had gone to bed. About the time I was ready to conclude my day, Norma would often be getting up for the first time. She would go to her desk and work on paperwork and projects. But, most of all, she cherished that time that she would spend with the Lord, in her Bible, during the middle of the night—surrounded by pictures ... and art.

On Sunday, Dec. 12, 2021, in the middle of the night, the Master Artist painted the final touches of color onto Norma's 98 years of Earthly life.

Only when we see her next will we fully appreciate the magnitude of His glorious craft.

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<sup>i</sup> Mrs. Whitcomb told her life story on a CD available from Whitcomb Ministries called "Brushstrokes of the Master Artist" (see [WhitcombMinistries.org/cds](http://WhitcombMinistries.org/cds)). She later gave this talk in a format that was incorporated into Whitcomb Ministries' radio ministry, *Encounter God's Truth*. Those programs can be accessed at [SermonAudio.com/Whitcomb](http://SermonAudio.com/Whitcomb) under the title "God's Brushstrokes on Canvas" (Parts 1 and 2). See Part 1 at

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<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=86161738431>. In total, she has 43 messages on SermonAudio. Mrs. Whitcomb also wrote out her biography twice on her blog, which is found at [WindowforWomen.blogspot.com](https://windowforwomen.blogspot.com). The first series was called "Life History of Norma Whitcomb" (Parts 1-4), and can be accessed at <https://windowforwomen.blogspot.com/search/label/Biography>. The second series was titled "My Canvas" (Parts 1 and 2). It began with Part 1 on Feb. 1, 2016, which can be accessed at <https://windowforwomen.blogspot.com/2016/02/my-canvas-for-your-interest-and.html>.

<sup>ii</sup> The article was published as "John C. Whitcomb: Hero of the Faith," in *Gospel Herald and The Sunday School Times* Vol. 23, No. 4. (Fall 2005): 12-13. I continued to research Dr. Whitcomb's life story and was privileged to contribute "A Biographical Tribute to Dr. John C. Whitcomb Jr." to the multi-author volume written in his honor, *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, eds. Terry Mortenson and Thane Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), pp. 437-451.