



# THE FATHER OF HOLLYWOOD

Someplace in El Dorado Hills, Gaelyn Whitley Keith, the mother of two grown daughters welcomed her first grandson into the world in October of 2005.

Her grandchild born almost two years ago, has a unique heritage. In fact, for more than five years, Keith has worked to chronicle and document the amazing life of her great-grandfather, Hobart Johnstone Whitley, who is five generations and more than 100 years removed from her new grandson. The result is Keith's first published book called *The Father of Hollywood*. "It's about my great-grandfather," Keith says. "He founded Hollywood, California and named it."

This makes Keith's new grand-son someone with some very interesting reading to do when he gets older and also a member of a family that is more-or-less responsible for providing the tone and color, as well as the 'meta-nym' (or well-known catch-all 'brand-name') for what the world knows as the multi-zillion dollar 20th Century film and TV industry. If you reference Hollywood to anyone in New York, London, South Africa or the deep interior of China, almost anyone knows what you mean, but not of course, this baby boy despite his rich heritage.

As Keith's grandson grows, a new chapter in the history of this Californian family will also unfold. Keith was born in Long Beach and lived for 20 years in Manhattan Beach, California. She graduated from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo with a degree in Business Marketing. She worked a bit in the magazine industry as a business accountant and also provided a program magazine for the Dixon Scottish Cultural Association out of Dixon, which earned a national award for excellence. Keith is of Scottish descent and there's no doubt that Hobart Johnstone Whitley, the subject of her book, is the same. "I'm a free spirit," she says. Other words she uses to describe herself are 'young' and 'vibrant'.

But writing any book, much less a fact-based book as difficult and challenging as this 304-page family history, with all its names, dates and places, was not something Keith had planned for herself. Indeed, given that the topic is so well known and the famous old Hollywood personalities also closely observed by Hollywood fans for many decades, 'The Father of Hollywood' is a book that required very precise research and composition.

The many hours of research were imperative if only to avoid the criticism, controversy and debate that will doubtlessly follow. The reason is obvious: everyone would like to own a piece of Hollywood history and many people claim to take credit for getting it all started, if not actually choosing the city's name. "I was almost going to write a book about him for a long time," Keith says. "I felt he was worthy of a book."

Finally, last November the almost became reality. The book is more than 100,000-words long and the cover features a gorgeous black-and-white photo of well-known actress and film star, Jean Harlow.

So, who was the Father of Hollywood? In a 'note from the author' that opens the book, Keith writes: "Why did the Los Angeles Times and others in the community give him this title? Whitley Heights was the Beverly Hills of yesteryear and some of the most impressive homes in Hollywood are located there. Stars like Jean Harlow, Ethel Barrymore, Charlie Chaplin, Marion Davies, W.C. Fields, Harold Lloyd, Carole Lombard, Rudolph Valentino and many others lived and held legendary parties in the Heights. How did he get them to settle there? What was the magical draw this amazing man possessed? Learn the true story of how Hollywood got its name."

Keith had the help of her great-grandmother, Margaret Virginia Whitley (known as Gigi in the book), in the writing of "The Father of Hollywood" (if not in the living of it). Margaret kept diaries and journals of her life and 47-year marriage with Hobart, which given this man's whirlwind of entrepreneurial energy as he passed through this world, may have been about all she was able to do just to keep up with him. Margaret's writings were kept in an attic for many years, hand-written or typed, as notes or letters---as many as ten boxes. "My mother always said they were a hidden treasure," says Keith. "They were all mumble-jumbled. It was hard to say what's-what. That's why it took so long to write it." Margaret was not without her own colorful writing style: "My lingering thoughts are of the bird's greetings with their sweet carols, flowers with their wonderful colors, fragrances that waft here and there and the mountains and valleys with their divine power to impart peace and give inspiration to my faith..." as she is quoted in the preface of her great-granddaughter's book.

It's hard to capture Hobart's life briefly in an article like this. He seems

