

Weathering the storm

By Rudi Whitmore

After driving to work in Cleveland every day for almost 30 years, Marty Whitmore will soon be out of a job.

Marty Whitmore has been getting up at 3 or 4 a.m. for over 29 years. Like the mailman, he perseveres through wind, rain, sleep, and the occasional blizzard.

"I think I only turned around and went home once," he says. "Our car went into the ditch twice before we gave it up for the day."

He goes to work every morning with coffee and lunch in hand for the 43-minute trek to Cleveland. He has kept this one routine steady through all of his life's changes; a divorce, two children in college, a renovated home, countless games of poker, and more recently, pool.



His one constant will be closing in six months. Lubriquip, a manufacturer of lubricated machinery parts, has employed Marty since he was 19. Staying with the company through numerous lay-offs in the 1980s, he worked as a shipper for the company, making sure parts got into the crates he built, with their correct labels, into the trucks, and to their destination.

Rattle off any zip code in the United States, and he can get you within the state. "Um... 93726? California, absolutely. Central... probably Fresno."

Correct though he may be, he's not thinking about work, or how there might not be any, tonight.

"Hey J-Lo!" He calls over his Coors Light to a pool buddy, "Heard any good jokes lately?"

J-Lo looks up over his cue, lines up his shot, misses, and then nods. "So Oprah Winfrey sleeps with..."

Ned and Ted, local twins, nod at Marty from the bar.

“Can't believe it, Marty.” They're also Union workers, getting out of the factories only three years before they closed. “We're so sorry.” Ned shakes his head. “Thirty years...”

Marty shakes his head, firming his mouth for a moment, then smiles, blue eyes sparkling, maybe too much in the dim bar light.

“Whatcha gonna do, ya know?” He shakes his head. “We've got a game tonight.” The twins nod, order a beer, and the bartender cracks open his choice without asking. “House, Marty.”

Speaking later, he spreads large hands, fingers blunt-tipped and capable. “There's nothing to do. I've... My son's friends are helping me. They're college students, and they're helping me get a resume together, to make it look good.”

He's an area local, moving into the home he grew up in when his parents built another house across the street. He raised his two children there. After his divorce, he moved into another house, renovated it, and made it completely his own, down to the sage green kitchen, the storm-gray living room, and the porch lights with the white casing.

There's a job, mostly like the one he has now, in Washington. He loves traveling, and has a motorcycle and a spare helmet for anyone who wants a ride. But his favorite part of any trip is coming back home.

“I know people in Washington ... It's just so far. I've never wanted to live anywhere but here.” He picks up his discolored tabby that his daughter named Apostrophe that he affectionately calls 'Baby,' and lights a Marlboro Red. “Never thought it'd happen to us, ya know?”