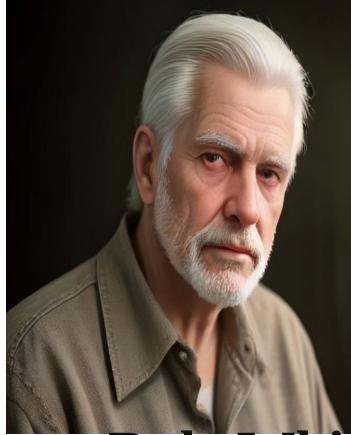




Vernon Dale Whitlock

April 9, 1942 - August 19, 2026

Fort Smith, Arkansas

Vernon Dale Whitlock died in Fort Smith on August 19, 2026. He was eighty-four. Born there on April 9, 1942, he grew up hearing the yards before he understood a map. His father worked a switch. Vernon learned that a coupling is a promise: it holds, or the whole story comes apart in the dark.

For thirty-six years he was a carman, crawling under freight that other men only blamed. He arrived early. He did not advertise. Foremen called him because he would write up a cracked bolster even when the train was already called. He charged a fair hour and a smaller one when a church van needed a lift more than a sermon. He kept a notebook of cars, not clients. The notebook had grease on the edges.

He married Imogene Whitlock in 1964. They raised three children in a frame house that needed a new porch every twenty years. Imogene kept the garden and the choir. Vernon grilled on Sundays and considered a plate of smoked chicken a seasonal obligation. After his knees quit the worst pits he still came out for a favorite string of hoppers, moving slower, doing the same honest work.

Friends remember a man who wiped his hands before he shook yours, who could stand in a noise without making it a personality, and who left a track cleaner than he found it. He loved the river at evening, a glass of tea he did not finish, and the sound of a train that had decided to live. He died in Fort Smith, in the city whose yards had written his calendar. The hump still works. Someone else will hear the knock that means trouble.

Services

Visitation in Fort Smith, then a simple service. A gift to a rail-workers' assistance fund or a neighborhood pantry is welcome.

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