



TOUCHING THE HEM

Born James Allen Whitmore Jr. on Oct. 1, 1921 in White Plains, NY, he grew into a natural athlete which won him a scholarship to Yale University, where he studied Law. While there he was a member of the Yale Drama School Players and co-founded the Yale radio station.

With his sporting career curtailed by a knee injury his interest in acting took precedence and led to Whitmore pursuing his love for performing with determination. After serving in the Marine Corp in the South Pacific in WWII he returned home to study acting at the American Theatre Wing and the Actors Studio.

In 1947 he got his big break on Broadway, when he won a Tony award for his debut performance in, *Command Decision*. This led to a contract and the beginning of a long career in movies when he was cast in, *The Undercover Man* (1949).

In a distinguished career, his great versatility and unconventional looks saw him appear in more than 50 movies including a role in the best giant-ant movie ever made, the Sci Fi classic, *Them!* (1954). In 1968 his distinctive voice made him instantly recognisable, despite extensive simian prosthetics, as the orang-utan President of the Assembly in *Planet of the Apes*. He also appeared in some of the world's most popular television shows, including, *The Twilight Zone*, *Dr Kildare*, *Rawhide*, *Gunsmoke* and *Bonanza*.

One of his best loved performances came late in his career in Frank Darabont's hugely popular, *The Shawshank Redemption*. As "lifer" Brooks Hatlen, Whitmore finds himself unable to cope with life outside of prison and is driven to suicide. The veteran actor brought great pathos to the role and delivered a genuinely touching portrayal.

Despite his success in Hollywood his greatest love was always the stage and in the 1970s he won much critical acclaim for his one-man performances on Broadway that brought to life such American icons as, Will Rogers, Harry Truman and Theodore Roosevelt. He went on to star in the movie adaptation of *Give 'em Hell, Harry!* (1975) which earned a nomination for an Academy Award.

Towards the end of his life he won an Emmy for his role in the TV drama *The Practice* and an Emmy nomination for *Mister Sterling*. His final film appearance was in, *The Majestic*.



"I never thought I was good," he told the Palm Beach Post in 2002. "I've touched the hem of the garment a few times but never grabbed it full-hand."

He died on February 6, 2009, aged 87 and is survived by his third wife, Noreen, three sons from his first marriage and eight grandchildren.

