



Pacific County

Falkner/Habersetzer

“For us, tree farming is an amazing heritage, a legacy of my family who came west to homestead. They put their hearts and souls into this farm. Now we have the responsibility to be good stewards of this legacy and to honor their memories. We are entrusted with doing the best we can to ensure that the land is taken care of so that it can be received by the next generation.” – Lynette Falkner

The 837-acre Custer Creek Tree Farm has been loved and cared for by five generations of the family. Bob and Lynette Falkner are grateful and dedicated to this legacy and the lessons in life learned from Lynette’s parents, Victor and Ruth Habersetzer. Their commitment was recognized in October of 2003 when they were awarded “National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year” by the American Tree Farm System.

Their legacy’s roots can be traced to 1885 when Lynette’s great-grandparents, Leonhard and Rosa Habersetzer, came from Wisconsin to Mt. Angel, Oregon. They later settled with two other families in Frances, Washington, and homesteaded land in 1888. In the early 1900s, Lynette’s great-uncle Cornelius (Colonel) purchased the adjoining Custer homestead. Her grandfather William also farmed and logged in the area.

As the older generations passed, William’s son Victor continued the homestead. He had grown up working on the farm so he knew it well. In 1948 Victor married Ruth Snow and together they operated the farm. Victor had developed a Puritan work ethic from living through the “hard times” of the depression. He milked the cows in the early morning, worked all day logging in the woods, and returned to milk the cows at night. He loved the land and was happiest when out in his woods hunting, fishing or just going for a walk.

“Tunny” McCollum, who was starting the Pacific County Chapter of the Washington Farm Forestry Association (WFFA) approached Victor in the late 1950s. From that point, he and Ruth became active members. Ruth focused on legislative battles by getting petitions signed and writing letters to legislators, newspaper editors and anyone else she thought needed to know about the issues.

With the intention that his daughter marry into a tree farm family, Victor would invite Lynette to Farm Forestry picnics in hopes she would meet a suitable companion. Although the picnics did not manifest her future husband, she did find a partner who shared her faith heritage and would dedicate his life to the family tree farm. They were married in Frances, Washington in 1978.

Bob, “I saw how Nettie loved the land and how important it was. I remember taking walks with her dad and the things that he would show me. He could tell me where he logged a patch of timber and why he logged it. Her mother and I would sit at the kitchen table and talk about the tree farm. She knew the details of which piece of land was where, what section it was in, the taxes due on it, who replanted it and when, the approximate volume removed from it, and when it was logged. What a gift she gave us as she shared her knowledge of the land.”

Lynette, “As it turned out, Bob did become interested in both the tree farm and the political arena. He kind of had a part of my mom and a part of my dad that he incorporated into his spirit. To be the National Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year was a dream that my dad had. We can give dad and mom that gift now. I’m so grateful that she lived long enough to share this honor. She was just thrilled.”

Early on, Bob wanted to learn more about managing the land and started taking Small Woodland classes at Centralia College. From there he became involved with the Lewis County Chapter of WFFA.

Lynette, “Bob started out not knowing much about tree farming. That soon changed, as he became friends with the people in Lewis County. They were great. In the summer of 1988, these folks held a twilight tour at our tree farm. While looking out over the hillsides to the valley below, Bob said, ‘Wow, I sure have a lot to learn!’ Doug Stinson turned to him and said, ‘It’s okay Bob. We’ll teach you.’

And that’s exactly what they did. They took us under wing. We have a special place in our hearts for the Lewis County Chapter. That’s where we got started and then they encouraged Bob to get the Pacific County Chapter reactivated. That’s the wonderful thing about tree farmers, they’re willing to share the knowledge they have and walk the journey together. This is something I’ve discovered over-and-over again as we meet with tree farmers all across the nation. They’re really wonderful and caring people.”

Over the years, the Falkners have thinned, logged, pruned and planted thousands of seedlings on Custer Creek Tree Farm. And they have continued Ruth’s legislative battles for property rights. The homestead has been used for field days, school field trips, retreats and tours.

Lynette, “There is no question that Custer Creek Tree Farm is rich in history. While walking through the woods, it’s not uncommon to find little pieces of old cable, saw blades, old bottles, railroad spikes and one time we even found a milk can partially buried beside some trees. If these items could talk, what amazing stories they could all tell about the glory days of logging and the things that happened at the old logging camp.

“This heritage that we look back on enriches our lives with a sense of purpose. It gives us a glimpse of our roots by revealing the stories of people who laid the foundation of this farm with their hopes and their dreams. They cultivated the soil with a love of the land. They truly gave birth to a new creation of farmland, a homestead, and mills to harvest the timber.

“We have attempted to offer our children this history, so that it will become their story in which to write new chapters. We have surrounded them with memories that will hopefully nourish them in times of uncertainty. These are the seeds of tomorrow that we have planted, hoping that this fifth generation will love the land just as those who have gone before them loved it.”

“She was always a positive person. One of her mottos was, ‘Keep Fighting the Good Fight’. She never, ever gave up.” – Lynette Falkner, speaking of her mother, Ruth Habersetzer

CUSTER CREEK TREE FARM :: GENERATIONAL

Leonhard Habersetzer, 1844 - 1917

Rosa Steible Habersetzer, 1848 – 1906

Great Uncle Cornelius (Colonel), 1872 - 1929

William Carl Habersetzer, 1882 - 1943

Elizabeth Meyer Habersetzer, 1880 - 1960

Victor William Habersetzer, 1908 - 1982

Ruth Snow Habersetzer, 1911 - 2003

Mary Lynette (Habersetzer) Falkner, born May 29, 1953

Bob Falkner, born December 16, 1955

National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year, 2003

Western Region Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year, 2003

Washington State Tree Farmers of the Year, 2002

Pacific County Tree Farmers of the Year, 2001

WFFA State Treasurer, 1990-2000

Pacific County Farm Forestry Association President, 1989-1995

Lewis County Farm Forestry Association Board of Directors, 1987-1991

Life members of the Washington Farm Forestry Association

Member Lewis County, Pacific County and South Sound Chapters