

Pierce County

Harmon Van Slyke

“The Van Slyke family came from Holland to the new world when New York was New Amsterdam.” Harmon Van Slyke describes his family heritage.

“Down through the years the family moved west. My grandfather Alfred Van Slyke was a lieutenant in the Civil War in the Union Army. My grandma Mary came to Vaughn from Kansas in 1887. Grandpa built

a mill and cut the lumber for a new three-story house. My father’s name was Harmon and my mother’s name Grace. Grandpa ran the post office, the store and was the justice of the peace.”

Harmon Van Slyke was born and raised in Vaughn, Washington. He graduated from Vaughn High School and married Jane Bradley, his childhood sweetheart. Jane, “I was born in Haver, Montana and came out here when I was four. When we met we were little kids and we’ve gone with each other forever.”

Harmon comes from a long line of loggers and worked with his father at a logging company as a choker setter. But after high school he chose college over logging and graduated from the University of Washington with an elementary teaching certificate.

Harmon, “I taught two years at Belfair, Washington, then went in the service. Did my basic training at Fort Lewis and was put in the Army Engineers Construction Battalion. We left from Seattle and went overseas and went all the way to Okinawa. I spent about two years out there. Then the war was over and I came home. That was 1944 to 1946.”

When Harmon returned from active duty, he left teaching and went back to his roots, taking a job with the Davidson Logging Company. Harmon, “About 1950 I wanted a vacation to go fishing down the Columbia River for a week. They said I couldn’t have the time off, so I quit my job and went fishing. I had an old D4 Cat and started working for myself. I logged around this area and dumped the logs at the head of the bay. I formed rafts that were towed to Olympia, Tacoma, and different places. In 1953, I bought 78 acres in Pierce County. I still have that property.”

Whether it’s socialization, genetics, or example, like so many loggers, Harmon’s two sons have followed in their father’s footsteps. Retiring in 1980, Harmon split the business and passed it over to his sons. He spends his retirement as a tree farmer planting trees and in his shop building boats, specifically the ‘Andrea Jane,’ Harmon’s pride and joy.”

Harmon has been an active member of the Washington Farm Forestry Association since 1970 and was a recipient of the Pierce County Tree Farmer of the Year award in 2000.



“Tree farming and logging kind of go together. I would say that it’s very interesting work, something that never seems to be tiring or tiresome because there’s always something different coming along. It can be a very good life’s work if you like working outdoors and like working with trees. And it’s very rewarding too – if you have the chance to do that kind of work.” – Harmon Van Slyke

VAN SLYKE FAMILY TREE FARM

Harmon Van Slyke, born February 14, 1919

Jane Bradley Slyke, born March 10, 1921

Pierce County Farm Forestry Association

Pierce County Tree Farmer of the Year, 2000