



Pierce County

Bob & Mariella Arnold

“Small woodland owners today have to play a different ball game,” explains Bob.

Bob Arnold’s reading list exemplifies that a tree farmer can spend as much time in their favorite chair studying environmental issues as they do out in the woods. His reading list, which ranges from pesticides to biomass for energy, supports his position of using nature with minimal environmental impact and self-sustainability.

Born in Kansas during the Depression, Bob’s parents sold the family farm to move west in search of better jobs. His father worked on a dairy in Eatonville, Washington in 1941. A year later the family moved to Puyallup. After graduating from Puyallup High School in 1954, Bob joined the Navy. He married Mariella Gratzner when he finished his service and went to the University of Puget Sound on the GI Bill. His original plan was medical school, but lacking funds, Bob switched his major to teaching, graduating in 1963 with a bachelor of science in biology.

Bob worked at a junior high school teaching biology. “I had the kids outside. We were planting trees, raising critters in the classroom, field trips and all the rest of that stuff. I was offered a position of outdoor education coordinator in the Federal Way School District, but that didn’t particularly work out and I ended up at Jefferson High School teaching biology. I got bored teaching cutesy experiments the kids weren’t responding to. Sitting in my office one day, I looked up on the wall at a map of the school district and thought Forestry is what we need to do. So I started a Forestry and a Fish and Wildlife program.

“Then I was looking at the map on the wall another day in the school district and noticed all these gray areas that looked pretty good-sized. Turned out they were undeveloped school sites. One of them was on the north end of five-mile lake and had 54 acres with 400 feet of lake-frontage.”

The Vocational Forestry and Fish and Wildlife programs later merged into a Natural Resources program. Eventually classes moved down to the “Land lab.” They logged 10 acres, had a portable mill, planted Christmas trees, fruit trees, hybrid cottonwood trees and built a salmon hatchery fed by a 600 foot by 6 foot pipe from an area wetland. Bob, “The kids did all this. We were doing thinning. With the program we raised and planted over a million salmon in creeks in Federal Way.”

It was 1970, and Bob and Mariella were contemplating purchasing land. Bob, “The grand plan was to move to a place with 20 acres. In the process, a place came up for sale in Eatonville. It was logged off. They took the best and left the rest. We bought it after looking at it for four months. I was teaching. My net take-home pay was \$637. The payment and the taxes were \$350 a month and after all the bills we had \$37 of discretionary income. To make ends meet I started

teaching Forestry 101 at Tacoma Community College in the evenings, cut firewood, mowed hay, and during vacations worked with my father as a carpenter.”

The couple also became active members with the Pierce County Chapter of the Washington Farm Forestry Association (WFFA). Bob, “Fifty percent of the knowledge you take away from going to a meeting is from talking to people, not the speakers, per se, but the people. The idea is that while all this information is anecdotal, it is extremely valuable with farm forestry. The most significant things or tidbits you pick up are from talking to the vendors, researchers and other small woodland owners.”

Bob served as chapter president for nine years and was a political advocate for the small landowner. Bob, “People in forestry still have their feet on the ground for the most part. But then you’re being impacted by a lot of other people who are enjoying the heck out of the benefits but don’t produce a thing. Producers in the country are becoming few and far between and everybody else is living off their efforts. I’ve gone down to Olympia a few times to testify at hearings of the Forest Practices Board. I was probably the only bearded Republican that ran for Senate in 1975.”

Bob is an encyclopedia of information when it comes to using nature with minimal environmental impact. He doesn’t agree with the overuse of herbicides, “Right now we are seeing these herbicides, pesticides and antibiotics showing up downstream via the watersheds they are used in. Many break down in the soil but some take a longer time and therein lies the problem.”

Bob is a big believer in self-sustainability and spends the time to stay current on the topic. “Sweden gets ten percent of its energy burning wood for electricity. In rural communities the waste heat from a 10-megawatt, wood-fired generator could be used to heat hydroponics plants in greenhouses and then that hot water could go to fish-rearing ponds. This is being done elsewhere to stimulate the economies of rural communities.”

Bob and Mariella have spent many hours hiking and skiing in protected old growth forests in Mt. Rainier National Park and support the need for preserved as well as sustainable forests. Each year at the start of classes, Bob tells his students the story, “The Man who Planted Trees,” as it exemplifies the value of a forest. Even today, the couple’s most pleasant walk is where the tree branches bow over the road like the arches in a cathedral.

Bob’s parting advice to the next generation is to “...get involved with the community to help moderate some of the decisions made by people who don’t have a clue.”

RAPJOHN TREE FARM

Bob Arnold, January 26, 1937 (Frankfort, Kansas)

Mariella Gratzner Arnold, born July 20, 1938 (Tacoma, Washington)

President Pierce County Chapter, 1976 – 1984

President Zoo Society

Member Tacoma Mountaineers