



Whatcom County

Richard & Louise Westergreen

“When you look out the front window, there’s a sharp cliff and steep mountains.” Tom Westergreen describes the geographical backstory of his tree farm. “My great, grandfather built his house at the bottom of the mountain. I always thought it was interesting that he didn’t take the 160 acres down by the stream, but took the forestland toward the mountain instead, which was not the better land. Most people took the flatter ground first, for their homesteads.”

Nestled in the foothills east of Bellingham, Washington resides the Westergreen Family Tree Farm. With it are six generations of history dating from the time that Gust Westergreen, at the age of 20, left his family in Sweden in 1884 and immigrated to Manitoba, Canada, and then to Washington State.

Gust was drawn to the dramatic beauty of northwestern Washington that reminded him of his homeland. He first made his way by fishing, logging and working for the railroads before establishing a homestead on 160 acres in the Nooksack Township.

His son Albert Westergreen was born on that homestead on May 1, 1896. Albert took over the farm in 1920 after returning from the army. He raised cattle, drove a milk truck, and logged, all the while acquiring new land to expand the original homestead.

Albert married Ella (Knudson) January 14, 1920 and together they raised three sons: Richard, John and Leonard. John remembers how the family got by, “My mom helped Dad haul logs out with horses. Most of his income came from logging, although he worked driving a milk truck. When we came home from school we’d all pitch in and help him cut wood that he used to barter for our groceries and feed for the cattle. We’d pack it down, then sell and barter with it. Dad was so proud that during the Depression he never had to go on any type of relief; he was totally independent. Having the tree farm was the backbone. They were tough times, but we didn’t know any better.”

John went on to college with a career in agriculture. Afterwards, he returned to farm and work the flat lands owned by his parents. His brother Richard preferred the trees. Growing up on the family homestead, the brothers spent a lot of time with their grandfather Gust. Richard



respected his grandfather's wisdom when it came to trees and forestry. When his grandfather told him the trees would be worth something one day, he believed it. Richard, "I was saving little trees when I wasn't very big."

Richard graduated from Sumas-Nooksack High School in 1940 and then served in the Army until the end of WWII. Louise (Parrott) and Richard married in 1948 and moved into a 16x24 foot house on a 13-acre parcel that Richard had purchased the year before. The couple worked together to make ends meet. When Tom was born, Louise

would bring him out into the woods while she helped Richard work. Louise, "We had him in a box while we loaded logs with a CAT. The box was so he would stay put. He probably wasn't even a year old yet."

In addition to working in the woods, Richard drove a Darigold milk truck for 37 years, retiring in 1983 at the age of 62. Back in the late 1950s, Richard met Olin Fosnaugh, the state farm forester. Olin encouraged Richard to attend a Farm Forestry meeting, which was the first meeting held in Whatcom County. Richard left so inspired he became an active member, serving as president in 1965. Louise served 10 years as secretary for the Whatcom County Farm Forestry Association (WCFFA).

Tom, "A 1961 report that Olin did, includes some of Dad's tree farm philosophy. We started out with a plan and followed that over the years. It's funny reading it because Olin talked about planting Doug fir, grand fir and ponderosa pine, which really isn't entirely practical for this area. But, at that time people were starting to think about tree farming and learning different things. We've tried a number of different things over the years and learned by mistakes."

As an example of this trial and error approach, Richard stands as one of the first tree farmers to use the Hypo Hatchet, a tool used to suppress growth from alders, maples and other competing trees.

40 years ago, Richard didn't hesitate to purchase 160 acres of cutover land. He immediately took on the task of replanting and clearing out leftover hardwoods. Like most tree farmers, their management plan is doing small clear cuts, thinning to keep the trees healthy and replanting a variety of native tree species. Tom gives credit to his other brother Tom who over the years has helped maintain the legacy by doing a lot of the tree farm work.

Today, Richard and Louise live in a ranch-style home with a panoramic view of the mountains and Gust Westergreen's original homestead, which is all still in the family. The dining room window faces a large garden bursting with organic vegetables. All three of Richard and Louise's sons have careers in forestry and live close by. Their daughters Joan and Carol are also in farming related businesses. Tom, "When I was in seventh grade there was no question in my mind of what I wanted to do; I was going to go to college in forestry. Nobody else knew what they wanted, but I always did."

WESTERGREEN ENTERPRISE TREE FARM, GENERATIONAL

Gust Westergreen, 1864 – 1948

Selma Soderquist, 1864 - 1922

Gust and Selma's children: Janet Huntly, Freda Larson, Albert, Willie (infant death), Anna (infant death), Ellen Sealund

Albert Westergreen, 1896-1967

Ella Westergreen, 1901-1996

Albert and Ella's children: Richard, John, Leonard

Richard Westergreen, born September 27, 1921

Louise Westergreen, born February 7, 1927

Richard and Louise's children: Tom, Bill Ed, Joan, Carol

Tom Westergreen, born December 28, 1949

Richard: Whatcom County Farm Forestry Association Founding Member

Richard: President Whatcom County Farm Forestry, several years including 1968

Louise: WCFFA Secretary, 1973-1979

Tom: WCFFA President, 1977, again in the 1980s, again 2012-13

Tom: WFFA Treasurer, 1985 – 1990

Tom: WFFA President, 2012-2013

