



Larry E. Chapman

1911-1982

A few years ago, a friend recalled her first meeting with Larry Chapman. “He was a large man,” she said, “almost always dressed in a plaid shirt, with a gruff voice and a tremendously frightening demeanor. At first glance, he looked just the way you thought an Oregon logger should look.”

On the outside, maybe Larry Chapman’s veneer was a bit rough in spots. After all, he did spend over 30 years in the woods and bare-knuckle logging camps of Oregon and Washington, first as a U.S. Forest Ranger, then as a principal in Bohemia Inc., a Eugene forest products manufacturer. But Larry Chapman was something more than a simple “fernhopper,” as he would call himself. At heart, he was a philosopher. He was an outstanding husband and father. He parlayed a small investment into a founding role in a world-class company that by 1980 did \$30 million in annual sales, yet material things were low on his list of priorities. Larry was a quietly religious man who loved his Lord and had an abiding respect for His creations.

To that end, Larry Chapman was an ardent conservationist who believed that if man was to make use of God’s forests, he had a responsibility to replenish them. He played a

pioneering role in conservation, education and reforestation efforts throughout his life.

But it was his appreciation for the human spirit that truly set Larry Chapman apart. He believed in the dignity of man, and he was a tireless student of the human condition. Larry’s store of humor, anecdotes and wisdom, drawn from everyone around him, was legend. His notebooks, carried with him wherever he went, provided a fund of stories for every occasion. Some of the best were published by the company in several editions of ‘The Bohemia Story’, because Larry believed they deserved to be remembered long after the storytellers and their subjects were gone. Today, ‘The Bohemia Story’ is still in print, but it’s only a small part of Larry Chapman’s legacy.

The facts of Larry’s life are straightforward enough. But it is his simplicity, his compassion, and his convictions that take some explaining. Born in Lents, a Portland suburb, in 1911, Larry graduated from Benson High School in 1930. As money allowed, he studied logging engineering at Oregon State University, beginning in 1931. With typical tenacity, he went for his final term and graduated with honors in 1959.

In the summer of 1931, Larry took a job as the Fairview Peak lookout in the Umpqua National Forest near Cottage Grove, Oregon. Thus began 15 years of work for the U.S. Forest Service throughout the Pacific Northwest – the remote rainforests of Washington State, the rolling green Umpqua National Forest, the rugged Sisters district of the Deschutes National Forest, and the high Blue Mountains of the Whitman National Forest near Baker.

Far from dreading the loneliness and solitude that was part of the lookout's job, Larry thrived on it, as this excerpt from a 1933 letter reveals, "And speaking of sunsets, last night we had one that fairly made me homesick for Bohemia (the Bohemia mining district, of which Fairview Peak is a prominent feature). The air was crystal clear after a shower and before the fall haze had crept back up the canyons. You know that kind of clarity. The sky is deeply blue overhead, but some way it shades off to an amber yellow at the horizon making that final ridge (the one that looks a million miles away) stand out sharp and clear..."

His early work for the Forest Service was a great influence in the development of the Larry Chapman who was so widely loved and admired. He relished the solitude, and the opportunities to observe God's creation and ponder it undisturbed. Lookout work cemented his future direction in several important ways. First, it convinced him to try the Forest Service as a career. Second, it developed this deeply religious man's relationship with the Lord. And third, a chance telephone call one summer introduced him to a certain red-haired girl who was to have a profound influence on his future happiness, Dorothy Stewart.

Larry was not the sort of person who spoke easily about his deepest feelings and beliefs. Throughout his life, he used his writing to communicate the important things. Fortunately for Dorothy, Larry's work as a lookout gave him ample leisure time to write her long letters, and so a lifelong romance

took root. Larry and Dorothy were married in November, 1936.

With a new wife to support, Larry left school and took a full-time job as a ranger at the Sauk Ranger Station in remote Sauk, Washington. Two years later, they were transferred to Sisters in the Deschutes National Forest, where their daughter, Ann, was born.

Larry, Dorothy and Ann moved to Baker in 1940, where they adopted a son, David, and spent the war years battling fires and pests with severely-rationed manpower, funds and supplies. Larry managed to bring the forest through intact, but after 15 years with the Forest Service, and another new baby, Jeanie, it was time for a new challenge.

And the right opportunity soon presented itself. In 1946, Loran and Faye Stewart, Larry's brothers-in-law, asked him to join them in the purchase of Bohemia Lumber Company. At that time, Larry recalls, "...Bohemia was a haywire logging outfit and sawmill with a mortgage of unknown indebtedness," and 225 people on the payroll. Haywire or not, Larry and Dorothy anted up what was, in those days, a substantial sum and Larry became co-owner and secretary of the new Bohemia Lumber Company. With L.L. "Stub" Stewart in charge of finances, administration and public relations, Faye Stewart managing timber resources and the logging operation and Larry running the mill and sales, Bohemia expanded steadily through the 1950s and 1960s, with an occasional, hair-raising moment, of course. Under the leadership of "those darn kids," as they were known, the company diversified into veneer and plywood, pulpwood chips, particle-board, laminate beams, balloon logging, real estate, modular housing, fencing, railroads and marine construction. By the time Larry retired in 1973, the little company they bought for \$300,000 in 1946 and took public in 1969 had 1,900 employees and \$84 million in annual sales.

Those who expected Larry Chapman to spend his retirement in a hammock, or walking a

Hawaiian golf course, didn't know Larry well. That's not to say he couldn't relax and enjoy the good things in life, such as free time with Dorothy, his children and grandchildren. But right up to his death from cancer, Larry Chapman remained an active participant in, and supporter of, good works of all kinds – education, conservation, the church and many other charitable organizations.

Larry Chapman died in May, 1982. But his wit and wisdom live on to an unusual degree in the memory and hearts of those who knew him.. Many people have been entertained and

influenced by his book, Hang In There. Three favorite proverbs make an appropriate footnote to his life:

“Every man should pull his share of the load, considering that some have greater strength.”

“Great things can be done if it doesn't matter who gets the credit.”

“Since we are only pilgrims on this earth, leave the campsite a little better than you found it.”